H.E. BATES
Gay New Story

argosy

Edward Hyams
Michael Gilbert
Victor Canning
Gerald Sparrow
E. L. Malpass

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Gay New Story by

H. E. BATES

"GOOD GRACIOUS," Aunt Leonora suddenly yelled, "that damned cow's eating the lupins again!"

A moment later, gold spectacles prancing, she was rushing with revengeful haste through the open french doors of the sitting-room and into the garden, snatching up on her way out one of the many old ash-plants, gnarled as twisted parsnips, that she kept handy for the purpose of chastising trespassers, stray animals, tramps, idlers, salesmen, and anyone else who might be standing about and up to no good in the process.

"Shoo, you beast! Get out of it! Cow, do you hear?"

I followed her immediately, searching the calm sunny borders of the June garden in vain for a single sign of any trespassing cow. I should have known that none ever came there, that they were as mythical as the marauding herds of deer that nightly threatened beetroot and bean-rows, bringing Aunt Leonora downstairs with beating sticks and flashing lanterns.

I saw instead a tubby, mild-looking man, with a white top-knot of hair and a very scrubbed pink complexion, who looked not at all unlike a round fresh radish, standing with an air of absent surprise on the edge of the lawn, beyond which large colonies of lupin rose in gold and purple spires. A floppy black umbrella, on which he was pensively leaning for support, gave him the estranged appearance of someone who had been unexpectedly dropped into the garden by parachute and did not know, in consequence, quite where he was.

Aunt Leonora, who was baggy and big-limbed and looked not at all unlike a rampaging cow herself, meanwhile rushed onward to enlighten him. It was still not clear to me whether, in her shortsighted way, she could distinguish between man and beast and I was half horrified, a moment later, to see her brandishing the ash-plant with violent challenge in the direction of the tubby man, obviously in readiness to beat him furiously about the rump.

A providential turn of his body brought him face to face with her, just in time. Undismayed, she yelled an instant demand to know what had happened to that damned cow she had seen trampling all over the place a couple of minutes before.

"It's yours, I suppose, isn't it? It would be!"

THE TRESPASSER

A look of almost ethereal surprise enveloped the tubby man so completely that he stood there as if embalmed. The gravity of things was evidently still not clear to him and when his mouth finally opened it was merely to let fall a single hollow word.

"Cow?"

"Yes, cow. A damned great red-and-white one. Chewing the lupins. Trampling all over the place."

"I—"

"They're always at it. They're in here every day." It was a blatant lie, though I am sure she was unaware of telling it. "Trampling and gorging everywhere. Where's it gone to? One can't grow a thing without its being chewed up like a—like a—" Aunt Leonora made a questing search of the air for a suitable damning word—"like a field of tares!" she suddenly spat out. The word tares, delivered with a final hiss, had a positive fire in it and set the tubby man back another pace or two. "Who are you anyway? Take your cow home. You're trespassing."

After a glare of stunning power had struck the little man like a point-blank charge of shot he managed somehow to find an answer. "I rather thought I was in my sister's garden," he started to say, "but—"

It was a most unfortunate remark to have made and Aunt Leonora at once seized upon it with peremptory scorn.

"That's a damn-fool thing to think," she said. "Sister? What sister? Whose sister?"

The tubby man, looking about him with deepening apprehension, almost despair, said he was terribly sorry but he could have sworn that this was The Limes. A flutter of repeated apologies ran from his lips in a muted scale, ending with the words "even the lupins looked the same—"

"Good God, man, The Limes? You mean you belong to old Broody? Her? She's your sister?"

"Miss Elphinstone—yes, she's my sister."

Aunt Leonora let out the rudest of snorts and said Good God, she'd never known that Broody had men in the family and then, as if the withholding of this family secret from her was a sort of unneighbourly crime, glared at him with furious disbelief, as if plainly thinking him a liar.

There was something ironical in the idea of her accusing someone else of not telling the truth, and the little man stuttered as he said, "Oh yes. There are three brothers."

"Married?" She threw the awful word at him with typical point-blank candour, clearly determined that no second family secret should escape her.

"Oh yes, we're all three married. In fact my eldest brother and I have each been married a second time."

"Caught twice, eh?" she said.

Unabashed, she bared her big friendly teeth and laughed into the tubby man's face with an expansive crackle and then a moment later further confused him by turning sharply to me and saying, "This is my nephew. He just called to bring me some aubergine plants for the greenhouse. Raised them himself. I'm mad about aubergines. Like them stuffed. Do you garden?"

Before the tubby man could attempt an answer she glared at me again, baring her big teeth, and shook the stick.

"You saw that damned cow, didn't you?" she said to me.

I started to say that I hadn't seen anything of the kind. Somewhere in the distant past a solitary wandering cow had so far trespassed as to reach its neck over the fence and take a few modest bites from a lilac bush. Since then Aunt Leonora's complex had developed from strength to strength and now rampaging cows were everywhere.

"I think it must have been this gentleman you saw," I said. "After all the light's very strong this morning—"

"What's it got to do with the light?" she said, and suddenly hurled at me a dark accusation. "Your eyes wander," she said. "I could hardly mistake a man for a cow, could I?"

I kept silent; spectacles seemed to do little or nothing for her acute shortsightedness, and I refrained from reminding her that once, on a misty September evening, she had mistaken me for a wandering deer as I returned from a mushroom trip and had struck me a number of severe blows about the elbows before I could stop her. Deer were worse than cows; she was convinced that they actually jumped the fences; they could clear a whole garden in a night.

"On a long visit?" she said, once again taking the tubby man by surprise with that fresh, alarming candour of hers, "or just here today and gone tomorrow?"

Startled again, he began to explain that he was here for a week and then, looking hastily at his watch, said that he thought he ought to be going. It was rather later than he thought; his sister was inclined to be particular about mealtimes. He didn't want to upset her.

"Which one are you?" she said. "Charley?- Now I come to think of it, I think I've heard old Broody talk of Charley."

"Oh no, Charley's my elder brother. I'm Freddie."

"Oh, you're Freddie, are you?" she said, rather as if there were some awful mistake about his birthright, and then suddenly turned on him a smile of such masterful charm, her big teeth

positively glowing, that I could have sworn his face reddened a little further. "Oh yes, of course. I think I've heard Broody talk of you too."

"Well, I must go. I must bid you good morning. It was awfully silly of me about—you know—and I—"

"We were just having a glass of sherry and a piece of saffron cake," Aunt Leonora said in the sweetest of voices. "Would you care to join us before you go?"

It was another blatant lie; we had been doing no such thing; she was merely putting it on for the trespasser.

"I honestly think I ought to go—"

"Oh, Broody and her lunch can wait. I suppose it's risotto anyway?"

"How do you know?" he said. "As a matter of fact it is risotto."

"Oh, I gave her the recipe years ago. She always has it on Thursdays. She's no imagination."

Back in the house I poured sherry into cut glasses at a sideboard and turned once or twice to see the tubby Mr. Elphinstone's eyes blinking and winking sharply in their effort to re-focus themselves after the blinding outdoor light of noon. This gave him an air of fidgeting discomfort, or as if he were dying to ask a question that had been bothering him for some time. And presently the question came.

"It rather made me smile, your calling her Broody. What makes you call her that?"

Aunt Leonora, looking up from cutting saffron cake, which she was placing in slices on small pink china plates that made her almost masculine hands look far larger and clumsier than they really were, said, "It's the way she walks. I say she always seems to have a clutch of eggs in her pants:"

Mr. Elphinstone actually chuckled. You could see that he thought it rather apt. Still chuckling, he accepted a portion of cake from Aunt Leonora, but the chuckle died suddenly on his lips when she said with pungent vehemence, "Your sister's an old flapdoodle. She's the sort of woman who you want to do things to. She seems to forget women are emancipated," she said, as if this had anything to do with it.

If Mr. Elphinstone had any thought of making a loyal and defensive protest about this accusative remark it was utterly useless; Aunt Leonora, in full cry again, gave him no time at all.

"You know what I mean?" she said. "You must have met women you wanted to do things to?"

A number of interpretations of this interesting theme sprang quickly to my mind and I sensed that they might be springing to

Mr. Elphinstone's too. He sipped at his sherry swiftly and must have been wondering what sort of house he had trespassed into when Aunt Leonora, almost as if in an attempt to save him from further embarrassment, said, "I mean most of them should have been strangled at birth, shouldn't they? or sterilised or something?" The mere suggestion of these harsh and unconventional measures made Mr. Elphinstone recoil. "I suppose your wives were different, weren't they?"

"Well—"

"Is your wife staying with old Broody too? How do they get on?"

Mr. Elphinstone, who had been pensively gazing for some moments at a remarkable but useless collection of hunting horns, silver cups, animal claws, and such trophies that Aunt Leonora always kept on or over the mantelpiece, now fixed his eyes on a large brass pestle-and-mortar and said that, as a matter of fact, his wife was not with him. She had passed away, he explained, some four or five years before.

With nothing more than a brusquely consolatory cough Aunt Leonora said she was very sorry to hear it and then turned to me and said, "Give Mr. Elphinstone some more sherry," as if this would do something to help sustain him in his loss.

"What do you feel about the sherry?" She shot the question at him point-blank, as always, in a sort of bark. "Like it?"

"Oh, excellent. Excellent."

"It's absolutely awful," she said. "It's plain muck. Don't drink it. We'd have done better to have the redcurrant wine. Get the redcurrant wine," she said to me. "We don't want to poison Mr. Elphinstone, do we?"

I murmured that that would, perhaps, be rather drastic, but I don't think she really heard.

"Bring the six-year-old," she called to me instead, as I went out to the kitchen. "That was a good year. I fortified it a bit that year—you can tell the difference."

When I came back with the bottle of wine—it was exactly the same brilliant colour as the ripe berries themselves—Mr. Elphinstone was just saying, as he gazed again at the hunting horns, "I see that you hunt."

"You don't see anything of the sort," she said. "I loathe it." She glared at him sternly; her teeth were bared like an open trap. "Do you?"

"Oh no, no, no."

"I love animals. I adore birds. A pair of flycatchers arrived yesterday. They always arrive at this time, every year. Are you interested in birds?"

Mr. Elphinstone confessed that he wasn't, very, and she glared at him with increasing sternness again. Mr. Elphinstone, who must have felt that he couldn't seem to manage to say the right thing at all at any time, looked quite nervous, almost shaken, at these constant accusatory glares and I tried to take the edge off things by offering him a glass of wine. He accepted this with eagerness and an upward half smile, the sort of smile that men often exchange when they feel that women are getting at them, and I half winked in reply. At this he seemed, I thought, quite comforted.

"And don't wink," Aunt Leonora said. "What there is to wink about I don't know." Another dark accusative glare followed. "It's always your eyes that give you away."

"I was merely saying cheers to Mr. Elphinstone," I said, "only in another way."

"Well, then say cheers," she said, "without the appendices."

"Cheers," I said, and Aunt Leonora said, "Cheers" too, at the same time fixing Mr. Elphinstone with yet another severe glare through her flashing gold spectacles.

It couldn't possibly have occurred to Mr. Elphinstone at this time that these constant glares were the inevitable result of her chronic shortsightedness—she simply had to glare in order to see objects at all—or that the very brusqueness of her candour meant that she was very fond of men. Her drastic measures for the proposed extermination of her sex were not accidental; she had been figuratively killing off flapdoodles like old Broody for years, just as she had been chasing and chastising imaginary hordes of cows and deer from her precious pastures of lupins.

Just as he must have begun to feel that the consistent barrage of glares was becoming too much to bear she suddenly smiled at him with utter sweetness, the sort of sweetness that only bony, toothy women of her kind can muster, and said, "Well, what do you think of the wine?"

Mr. Elphinstone, who clearly wasn't going to be caught out on the subject of wine a second time, hesitated a moment before collecting his thoughts and then said, "It's most refreshing."

"It's damn good!" she barked at him. "I'll tell you that. You won't get better."

"I will say it's unusual. It has a certain quality."

"No idea where I got the recipe for this from? No? The Black Forest."

She took a great gulp of wine, rolling it ripely round her tongue. "I was on a walking tour there with a girlfriend, years ago. We came to this place not far from Kreuznach, the spa you know, near the Rhine. Just a farmhouse, but we

liked it so much we stayed there a month. Splendid place. We got sozzled on this stuff every day."

"Sozzled?"

The word sprang from the lips of the surprised Mr. Elphinstone before he could stop it. Sherry and the first half glass of redcurrant wine had made his face pinker than ever, so that he looked more and more like a round, sparkling radish freshly washed.

"You don't need more than a couple of good big glasses," she said. "It's far more potent than any of your fancy hocks."

Two cuckoos, one chasing the other, both calling as they flew, went sailing over the garden a moment later and Aunt Leonora immediately jumped up and went over to the french windows on the chance of watching them. The midday light was glorious beyond her, and the lupins, at their unsullied best, glowed like tremendous candles in the noonday sun.

"Just the day to drink this stuff," she told Mr. Elphinstone. "Good to be alive. You can taste the berries in it—it's got that cool sharpness."

I accepted this as a signal to fill up the glasses. She held out hers with alacrity but Mr. Elphinstone professed a certain wariness, confessing that he didn't really drink at lunchtime.

"Good God, man, drink up," she said. "You've nowhere to go, have you?"

Mr. Elphinstone was bound to say that he hadn't anywhere to go, particularly, and I took the opportunity of replenishing his glass to the top.

"A zizz in the garden, I suppose?" she challenged him. Zizz was a favourite word of hers.

"Zizz?"

"Forty winks," she said.

She was still at the french windows, big and dominant against the sun, and suddenly she put her head outside, sniffing significantly.

"Wondering if I could smell the risotto."

This remark was nothing less than a piece of low corruption. I knew that it was uttered solely as a means of undermining Mr. Elphinstone's morale and I saw him start distinctly. But much worse was to follow.

"I've got cold salmon today," she said. As if the remark alone were not enough she gave another of those magnificently sweet, disarming smiles, her voice more airy than usual this time. "I suppose I ought to go and make the mayonnaise. Although the fresher it's made, I think, the better."

A confused Mr. Elphinstone took a long drink of wine and then

stared for some moments into his glass, clearly torn between departure and a dream of mayonnaise.

"By the way," she said suddenly to me, "you promised to go and gather the strawberries for me and you never did. Are you going to be a lamb and run down and get them?"

This was another blatant lie. No word whatever had passed between us about strawberries; I had no idea there were strawberries; but suddenly, on an unexpected and curious tangent of memory, Mr. Elphinstone's question about Aunt Leonora's hunting sprang across my mind and I said involuntarily, aloud, "By heaven you do."

"You what?" she snapped. "What was that you said?"

"Nothing, Aunt," I said. "I was just thinking aloud, that's all."

"Well then, don't," she said. "It's a bad habit." Yet another dark accusative glare followed. "It's even worse than thinking with your eyes."

After this I was determined, out of sheer obstinacy, not to hurry the strawberries and I deliberately poured Aunt Leonora, Mr. Elphinstone, and myself another glass of wine. As she received hers she said, "You'll find a dish in the kitchen. I think they'd look awfully nice in the green one—you'll see it, the one with the pattern of vine leaves."

I ignored this completely and stood sipping wine.

"Strawberries?" Mr. Elphinstone said. "You mean you actually have strawberries already? I say, that's very early, isn't it?"

"I grew them under cloches," she said. "You get them three or four weeks early."

"How wonderful." Pinker than ever, Mr. Elphinstone looked at her for the first time with uninhibited if slightly unsteady admiration. A sort of rosy dew had settled on the lower lids of his eyes, like a sparkling distillation of the wine. "I think that's absolutely marvellous."

"Hadn't you better go?" she said to me. "It'll take some little time and I—"

"Just going," I said. "Enough for how many?"

"Oh, don't be ungenerous," she called to me as I went through to the kitchen. "I mean—there are plenty."

When I came back from the kitchen garden, twenty minutes later, bearing the dish of remarkably fat ripe strawberries, the sitting-room was empty. But a peal of laughter of Aunt Leonora's from the kitchen, followed by a short chorus from Mr. Elphinstone, told me where to look.

In the kitchen Aunt Leonora was coaxing a basin of mayonnaise to its final smoothness and Mr. Elphinstone, now in his shirtsleeves and wearing a kitchen apron with a pattern of large red prawns all over it, was cutting up hard-boiled eggs into neat slices with a wire cutter. Two glasses of redcurrant wine stood on the kitchen table, and between them, on a rose-patterned dish, lay a very pleasant-looking portion of cold salmon, pink as Mr. Elphinstone himself, surrounded by sprigs of parsley and palest green circles of cucumber.

"Guess what?" Aunt Leonora said.

I guessed at once, and correctly.

"Mr. Elphinstone's going to stay to lunch," I said.

"Yes, I rang Broody," she said. "I asked her too but she felt she couldn't waste the risotto."

This, I was sure, was yet another blatant and scandalous lie and I looked her squarely in the eye about it. In reply she deliberately made her spectacles twitch and turned away in shameless and divine ignorance to her mayonnaise, dipping one little finger into it and then slowly licking it in bemused appreciation.

"If you've finished the eggs," she told Mr. Elphinstone, "you could sugar the strawberries." And then to me, "Give Mr. Elphinstone some more redcurrant. He's earned another swig."

It was a good idea, I thought, for all of us to have another swig but when I came back from the sitting-room Mr. Elphinstone had disappeared from the kitchen. I couldn't see him anywhere. Some moments later I observed a figure doing gymnastic exercises of a violent sort beyond the kitchen window. It was Mr. Elphinstone, energetic as any athlete, wildly hurling a clothful of wet lettuce leaves about his head like an Indian club, spraying drops of water everywhere.

He came back perspiring deeply, rosier, more radishy than ever.

"Good boy," she said sweetly. He beamed. He might actually have been a boy, praised suddenly for some good and sporting deed, and perhaps that was how she saw him, because a moment later she told me, "We're going to eat in the garden. It's just the day. Then afterwards Mr. Elphinstone can lie in the hammock and have a zizz."

"I must be getting along," I said. "Is there something else I could do before I go? Will you want another bottle of wine?"

"What do we say?" she said. There was something devilishly and deliberately familiar about that "we" as she tossed it into the air. "Will we want another? I think we will, won't we?"

"Anything you say!" Mr. Elphinstone said, laughing with

crackling merriment. Really rubicund now, he was tossing lettuce leaves into a glass dish with careless abandonment, rather as if they were useless lottery tickets. "Anything you say."

"I'll get another," I said.

"Magnificent stuff," Mr. Elphinstone said. "Absolute ambrosia."

"Don't forget the gooseberries and the eggs when you go," she called after me as I went into the cupboard under the kitchen to get the wine. "They're on the table just outside the french windows. I have heaps. Don't forget."

Having found the wine I couldn't resist asking, for the last time, if there was anything else I could do.

"What about the hammock?" I said.

"Oh, it's up. I used it yesterday. The night was so fine I didn't bother to take it down."

"What about cushions?"

"You're awfully dutiful today." This was really another dark accusation, deeply shot with suspicion. "Oh, Mr. Elphinstone will cope with the cushions, won't you, Mr. Elphinstone? After all he's the one who's going to have the zizz."

I took a last look from Aunt Leonora to Mr. Elphinstone. He seemed, I thought, to be having a sort of zizz already. His eyes, now rolling, now dancing, seemed to be like two excited valves bubbling pinkish water. He was actually chewing with rabbity pleasure on the crisp heart of a lettuce, as on a pale green cigar, and his forehead was so covered in perspiration that I fully expected to see it steam.

"Well, I'm on my way," I said. "Don't go overeating the strawberries. Have a lovely zizz."

"Bless you, my boy!" Mr. Elphinstone called, the lettuce heart dropping suddenly out of his mouth. "Hope to see you many times again."

I said I hoped so too and went away in rumination across the lawn, past the gold and purple spires of lupins, the ancient Blenheim apple tree where Aunt Leonora's hammock hung in shade, and finally out through the wicket gate in the hedge over which so many imaginary cows, not to say deer, so often seemed to rear their trespassing horns: quite forgetting, as I did so, to pick up the gooseberries and the eggs.

It was in fact three hours before I went back to pick them up. By that time, I reasoned, Mr. Elphinstone would long since have gone home to rejoin his sister; Aunt Leonora, if I were lucky, would be indoors, immersed in one of the numberless tasks the masterful energies of an emancipated woman so insatiably

demanded, jamming gooseberries, preserving cherries, candying flowers, so that it might be possible for me to sneak in and out again without being mistaken, as Mr. Elphinstone had been, for some trespassing, marauding cow.

But greatly to my surprise the hammock was still swinging gently to and fro in the deep shade of the apple tree, with Mr. Elphinstone inside it, having his zizz. In the hot June silence Aunt Leonora was sitting beside him, a protective ash-plant at the ready, her large angular frame uncomfortably perched on a rather small red camp stool, rocking him gently to and fro like a child. The look of drowsy beatitude on her face gave her an air of such protective tenderness that she looked utterly remote from the woman who had so sternly chased him, a few hours before, as a trespasser.

I was silently escaping down an avenue of raspberry canes when a peremptory wagging of the ash-plant called me back. I was still several yards from the hammock when she recognised me and, in the sternest of low whispers, greeted me with yet another dark accusation.

"What are you prowling about at? Skulking like a tramp. I caught one stealing cabbages off the compost heap the other day."

"Mr. Elphinstone looks remarkably comfortable," I said.

"Don't disturb him," she whispered. "He's worn out. He insisted on helping wash up and then actually ran the sweeper over the sitting-room." She showered on me the unexpected luxury of a toothy, angular smile. "He did love the strawberries. He had four helpings, and then finished up the cream with a boudoir biscuit." Mr. Elphinstone stirred suddenly—I could have sworn, with the buttonhole of one eyelid very slightly open—and gave the most kittenish of snores before settling back into the luxurious depths of his zizz. "He's had such a good long sleep. Don't you think he looks just like a child?"

I didn't; I thought he looked just like a fat red radish, as in fact he still does.

I suppose it was inevitable that Aunt Leonora should have married Freddie Elphinstone.

I suppose it is inevitable too that she always thinks of herself as the masterful partner, tirelessly energetic in organisation, up at six in the morning, hardly ever at rest, battling ceaselessly with chickens, eggs, the garden and its fruits, repelling idlers, cows, and trespassers and still telling, when it suits her purpose, those blatant innocent lies.

I suppose too there is a great deal to be said for women of

her kind, who feel themselves to be so strong that, out of a sort of powerful charity, they love to take the burden of things off the shoulders of weaker creatures.

I suppose too there is much, perhaps even more, to be said for pink, tubby little men like my Uncle Freddie, who always look like round fat radishes. Uncle Freddie never gets up for breakfast; he takes it in bed, with *The Times* and two other newspapers, at ten o'clock. At twelve he dresses, takes a walking-stick, strolls two hundred yards to The Duke of Marlborough, drinks two whiskies, chats about the weather, and walks home for lunch at one o'clock.

At two Aunt Leonora insists on his having a zizz. Very occasionally, when he wakes up, he plays golf or goes fishing, but not if it's too hot or too windy or too wet or too cold.

While he rests, Aunt Leonora, who adores more than anything brisk, healthy exercise in the fresh air, bicycles to the library, changes his books for him and hurries back so that he shan't be unduly idle between tea, for which she always serves two kinds of bread and-butter, three of cake and scones and four of homemade jam, and suppertime. After supper she busies herself with essential tasks like pickling eggs or drying flowers for winter while Uncle Freddie drops into a doze from which she finally wakes him with a glass of redcurrant wine, mulled in winter, and a homemade ginger biscuit.

How nice it must be to be mistaken for a trespassing cow and thence to achieve, with neither mastery nor struggle, all your purposes—not the least of which must be the long quiet zizz, under a shady apple tree, on warm summer afternoons.

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What about the Waldos

Bron was still smiling her secret smile like that old Mona Lisa

BY
E. L. MALPASS

SPELAEOLOGY?" said Mam. "Well, there is a word to go to bed with."

"Means exploring caves," I told her, showing off.

Mam went on rolling the pastry. "A grand word for crawling into a lot of nasty wet holes, I must say."

Undeterred, me. Busy strapping my bicycle lamp on my forehead, wriggling into my wellingtons. "Ta-ta, Mam," I said, a bit emotional. A tricky business, this spelaeology. Never know whether you're coming back.

"Ta-ta, Alun," Mam said. "Turn back before you come out in Australia, mind."

Off in a huff at that, wellingtons slapping angrily at the pavements, and up the entry for Bronwen Price.

"Just finishing her tea," Mrs. Price said. "But can't say I like this latest activity, Alun. Like an ill-sitting hen I am until Bronwen returns, me picturing her taking a wrong turning and being ejected from Vesuvius in a cascade of lava and red-hot cinders." Wrung her hands, she did.

"Safe she will be with me, Mrs. Price," I said, very reassuring. "Not going anywhere near that old Vesuvius." I liked Mrs. Price at that moment. She was not insensitive to the dangers involved. Different from some I could mention.

Then Bron came, wiping the jam from her friendly mouth, tucking her hankie in her blue knickers.

"Hullo, Alun, ready is it?"

And running through the streets we went, playing tag, but climbing always, and then the grey houses fell away, and the

crumbling brick walls, and we were in pitted fields of coarse, tussocky grass.

On we went, up the mountain, and the turf was springy, now, and we were no longer playing tag, but Bronwen's hand was in mine, warm and friendly, and our hearts were thumping, and we did not look at each other or speak, for when you are fourteen love is a thing of infinite shyness. A thing too wonderful to speak of, to be expressed only in the pressure of fingers, or the nearness of a beloved head.

Oh, beautiful it was on the mountain, with evening close at hand, and the blue smoke standing up from the little town below us, and Bronwen by my side, half woman, half child; and myself, tasting the first exquisite joy of manhood with the undimmed wonder of a boy.

But now a cave was before us, dark and dank. Bronwen gripped my hand more tightly. In we went, leaving behind the pretty evening and the singing larks. No larksong here. Only foul bats, carving the cold air like deformed swallows. The darkness stretched away before us, repelling and inviting at the same time. We groped our way forward in the yellow beams from our lamps. Hadn't been in this cave before. Very promising it looked, if you can call a black hole and a boulder-strewn path promising.

The cave narrowed. No walking side by side now. Single file it was, and mind your head on the roof. I went first. We were going downhill. This was the deepest cave we had found. I could not wait to see what was round the next bend. I hurried on, slipping on the wet rocks, banging my head and shoulders on the roof, telling myself I was treading where perhaps no man had ever trod; until my torch picked out an empty sardine tin.

The path became steeper, narrower. Like going down a chimney, it was.

"Careful here, Bron," I said.

No reply.

"Bron," I cried again, and the name flitted like a bat about the rocks. But there was no reply. Panic now. More alone than Robinson Crusoe, more alone than Adam before Eve. Oh, a lonely, hostile desert of a place, the inside of the lovely earth can be. I managed to turn round, shone my torch up the way I had come. Empty. Empty and silent as a tomb.

I hurried back, shouting, slipping, barking hands and knees on the sharp rocks. Not one to play jokes, that Bronwen. Must have fallen, must be lying hurt. But no sign of the girl. And then I saw another passage, leading off to the right.

There was a predicament! I shouted her name until I thought the roof would come down. Silence. I plunged down the new passage, moaning and gasping for breath. And the cavern forked, and forked again, and I stumbled on, and the great mass of the mountain weighed on me like a burial mound, and the sweet evening was a million miles away. And then, horror of horrors, my lamp flickered ominously, bringing me back to sanity. I stopped, switched it off, stood panting in the utter blackness, my hot forehead pressed against the cold stone wall of my prison.

"Alun!"

Had I heard a cry? I tried to quieten my sawing breath. There it was again. "Alun!" As far and muffled as on another planet. And with it another sound, a baying, trumpeting noise such as I had never heard before, but which chilled my blood.

I shouted the name of my young beloved until I thought my lungs would burst. And, like an echo off the moon, a cry of "Alun."

I switched on my lamp. Brighter now for a moment, and then failing again. I hurried on in its flickering light. I was a child, frightened by the dark. I was a man, seeking to save his loved one from the peril of death.

If I kept on, I told myself, I must find her. And then, in front of me, a wall of rock. The path had ended. My torch guttered out like a candle.

Only one answer, now. "Bronwen," I called, "I am going for help. Stay where you are."

"No," she cried.

But it had to be. Oh, hard it was to leave her there. I scrambled up in the hateful darkness, tearing nails and hands and knees. And at last the darkness was softer, and the night air was sweet on my face, and a young moon silvered the mountain.

Down the hill I went, running, leaping, heart pounding. How would she be when we found her, *if* we found her? Hurt, demented even? And what was that unearthly bellowing deep in the earth? The lights of the town were below me, infinitely friendly. But what good was that, when my girl was prisoned in that damned black brooding mass of mountain?

I came to the first street lamp. Running like a drunken man, now, pitching forward, arms hanging loose. Came to Price's, first. Into the kitchen, and seeing the fear leap into Mrs. Price's face.

"Bronwen," I said. "In the cave. Help—at once."

Sat down sudden, did Mrs. Price. "And her da at the Dinas Arms," she moaned.

Off to the Dinas Arms, me. Never been in a pub, before. Disappointing. Couldn't see where the attraction lay. But other things were on my mind. There was my da. And Mr. Price. My da lifting a tankard to his lips and putting it down, slow and thoughtful at sight of me. "What is it, good boy? Your mam fallen downstairs, then?"

"Worse," I said. "Bronwen Price, trapped in a cave on the mountain."

Silence in the big room. Then my da said quietly, "Sit you down, Alun boy, and tell us."

Angry, me. "No time for sitting," I cried. "Out of her mind with fear, she will be." Nearly out of my own mind, too, at the thought of her danger.

"Sit you down," my da said again, and his firm hand on my shoulder pushed me into a chair. But to the others he said, "Torches, ropes, blankets, a flask of coffee. And back here in five minutes, is it?"

The bar emptied sudden. My father spoke to the barman, brought me a little glass. "Drink this," he said.

Some sort of medicine, it must have been. Very nasty. But fortifying.

"Now," my da said. "What happened?"

Told him, I did, staring up at his face for signs of reproach or anxiety. But no reproach. No anxiety. Strong, my da's face was. And strong he was too, knowing what had to be done and wasting no time on "Why did you do this?" or "Why didn't you do that?"

Then Bron's father was back, and Mrs. Price, muttering and shivering, her eyes gone blank. Then the other men, flashing torches, settling ropes more comfortable over shoulders; silent, grave men, every one.

"Off you go, boy," my da said then, and me away like an arrow from the bow, and the men tramping behind, boots firm and purposeful in the quiet streets.

Oh, a strange procession that was, up the mountainside. The moon was low, now, big and yellow in the mists. The men's torches danced like bog candles. Not a word spoken. Only a humming, taken up by first one, then another, of some old chapel tune. Brought a great lump to my throat, that sad, strong music did on the bare hillside.

My father's hand was steady on my arm. "Sure you know the cave, boy?"

"Left my jacket to mark the entrance," I said.

But in the darkness there was a greater darkness looming before us. The men shone their torches about the opening of the cave. No jacket. We hurried on. Another cave mouth.

"Never knew there were so many old caves," said my father. But no jacket. And my Bronwen, alone, swallowed up by the devouring earth. Unbearable, it was.

Then, at last, a cave, and a jacket sprawled in the entrance. "Come on, this is it," I cried.

"Not yet," my da said. "Go you inside, Alun, and call."

I went inside, and called. The men stood silent, not breathing. I called again. My anguished voice echoed among the rocks. That was all.

I heard my father sigh. "In we go, then," he said. He went first, sending a man down each branching passage, stopping often to listen. But there was only the melancholy drip of water, the clatter of distant boots . . .

Up till now he had kept me with him. But when our passage forked he sent me off to the left with a borrowed torch. "Take your time," he said. "Don't want any casualties." But I was already away, half mad with worry, down the wide tunnel.

Easy going this, down a gentle slope. And then I heard again, only nearer, the strange trumpeting noise I had heard before. Never had I known a sound so terrifying. But my fear for Bronwen cast out any other fears. I hurried on.

The trumpeting grew louder, filling the cave. And then, suddenly, the passage opened into a great vault whose roof was higher than any cathedral's. And I knew that all my fears went for nothing, for this was the very stuff of nightmare. Dreaming I was, in my bed at home—until I pinched myself and felt the pain, and knew that, after all, this was no dream.

I stood on a lonely shore, and before me stretched a black, unrippled lake. And in the beam of my torch creatures, long and sinuous, played and dived and gambolled in that tideless sea. Theirs was the trumpeting I had heard.

I stood for a long time, forgetting even Bronwen in my amazement. Oh, pretty the creatures were, sleek, small-headed, happy in their undisturbed play. Then, with awful reproach, I remembered my love. I set off, beside that sunless sea.

Far away, I saw the light of an electric torch. And there I found her. Sitting on a boulder, with one of the creatures stretched out beside her, its head on her lap, gazing up at her in the circle of brightness like a devoted spaniel.

Crazed by her ordeal, I thought her. But not a bit of it. Just too taken up with her new pet to have much time for me.

"Oh, Alun, there is sweet my Waldo is," she said, patting the foolish head. "Been longing for you to come and see him."

Strange how anxiety, ending sudden, makes us so angry. "Listen, girl," I said, "half Dinas is in this mountain, searching for you. And here you sit, crooning over a damn sea serpent."

"He is *not* a damn sea serpent," she said, bending down and kissing the ridiculous creature's forehead.

A curious thing, love. Jealous even of a marine monster, I was. Down on my knees now, anger forgotten, and taking her in my arms. "Oh, Bron, Bron, there is worried I have been, thinking you lost for ever."

She looked at me, then. "Alun."

Clumsily, our lips met. We kissed, the first, long, hungry kiss of youth.

At last: "Ought to be going," I said. "Out of her mind with worry, your mam is."

"Oh, there is thoughtless I am."

She jumped to her feet, dislodging the monster. Hurt, he looked. We set off along the shore, arms clasped about each other's waists.

There was a plodding, squelching noise behind us. I looked back, shone my torch. Being followed, we were. I stopped. "Back," I said. "Shoo."

The creature paused, hung his head, reproachful. Too much for Bronwen's soft heart, that was. Went and put her arms round his long neck.

"Coming with us, he is," she said firmly.

Settled it, that did. Floundering after us he came, up the long passage, out into the night air.

Mrs. Price was waiting in the entrance. She saw Bronwen. Didn't say a word. Just stood, mouth trembling, tears running down her cheeks, holding out her arms. Then she and Bron were clinging to each other, lost to the world, until a devoted head began to nuzzle against Bronwen's skirt.

Mrs. Price looked down. And screamed blue murder.

"Sweet, isn't he?" said Bron. "Get Da to build him a kennel in the yard."

"Be wanting something more like a garage, if you ask me," said my father's voice. Tired, he looked. "So you're safe, Bron. Thank heaven for that."

He went back into the cave, shouting. One by one the men began to appear. Last to come was Bronwen's da. He kissed Bron without a word. Maybe there were no words for what he was feeling. Then he saw the monster. Just stood there, he did, rocking slightly.

"The latest addition to the Price household," my da said cheerfully, effecting introductions.

"No," said Mr. Price. "No. A dog, two cats, a stray kitten, a bowl of goldfish, and a budgie are enough for any pet-minded family." He shuddered. "More than enough."

"But Da, he *wants* to come," pleaded Bronwen.

"And I don't care what he wants. He's not coming."

Crestfallen, the monster looked. But not one to give in easy, that Bronwen. "Pleased you have always been when I have brought stray creatures home. Kittens—"

"Stray kittens are one thing. Stray sea serpents are another," Mr. Price said, not without some justification.

The argument went on. How quickly, once a danger is passed, we come back to our trivialities—if you could call a two-ton Waldo a triviality, that is.

But they might as well have saved their breath. Waldo was coming, and nothing short of a line of tank traps would have stopped him. As soon as the party set off down the hill Waldo brought his four splay feet into action and followed.

An ungainly walker, that one, rolling heavily from side to side, grunting, snuffling, his tiny eyes fixed adoringly on Bronwen.

"Getting on my nerves, he is," Mrs. Price said. She went on a little farther. "But what are we going to *do* with him?" she asked, voice tight as a fiddle string.

Mr. Price had had a nerve-racking time. He stopped. "I don't know," he shouted. "But if you can suggest a way of persuading him to return to his native haunts, glad to hear it I shall be."

"No need to shout," Mrs. Price said, very dignified. "Simply wanted to know how you think a denizen of the deep will fit into the somewhat narrow life of Glamorgan Terrace."

A poser, that one. Mr. Price was silent. But now we were back under the street lamps. Viewing the little procession with interest, people were. We came to Price's entry.

"Ta-ta, Bron," I said. There were so many other things I wanted to say to this girl, back from the shores of Lethe. But not able to say them.

"Ta-ta, Alun." Her smile was bright in the lamplight.

"Good night, all," Mr. Price said. "Thank you for your assistance." Up the entry he went, followed by his wife, his daughter, and his latest burden.

Terrible it is to be encumbered by an unwanted monster. There was Mr. Price studying advertisements for sectional garages, and Mrs. Price running up great bills with Evans the

Fish. Everybody saying, "Ought to get rid of the creature, they did," but nobody quite knowing how to set about it. When it came to monster-disposal, practical experience seemed to be lacking in one and all.

Caused trouble with the neighbours, too. If Waldo did not get enough to eat he would trumpet all through the night. "Might as well have a fog signal in the backyard," Mrs. Jones Seventeen said.

But Mrs. Next Door went and saw the police. "Just about fed up I am," she told them, never one to mince her words.

"Have to get rid of it, boy," Constable Protheroe said, thumbs in belt, shaking his head.

"But how?" said Mr. Price. "That's all I'm asking you to tell me. How?"

Stroked his chin, did Constable Protheroe. "Could try the Fire Station," he suggested.

But then there was Bron, throwing her arms round the besotted creature's neck and vowing that if they sent him to the Fire Station they would have to send her, too.

At his wits' end, Mr. Price was. And then, to crown everything, he began to realise that Waldo was still growing! On arrival he had taken up only half the garden. Now he was overflowing on to the path and endangering the runner beans. And Mrs. Price was damn near buying up Evans'. Everything from halibut to fish fingers, that Waldo was eating.

Mr. Price found a collar and lead that had belonged to one of Bronwen's earlier, and less embarrassing, protégés. He put it on Waldo and led him off to the Dinas Museum.

Very regretful, they were. A dead and stuffed Waldo, they said, they would have welcomed with open arms. But a live and kicking one—they shrugged. They were sorry.

So, one evening, Bronwen and I set off up the hillside once more, an eager Waldo lumbering between us. Very sad, my girl was, but even she realising it was either this, or mortgaging the old homestead to Evans the Fish. We came to the cave. We went in. We found the passage to the land-locked sea. Down we went.

Interesting to see the emotions that flitted over Waldo's features when he saw his friends at play. A feeling, undoubtedly, that he had been here before. A feeling that it looked rather fun. He cocked an eye at Bronwen. She nodded. With a look of pleasurable anticipation he slid into the water and sailed away, full-steam ahead.

We watched his gambolling for a long time. Then I touched Bron's arm. She looked up. Crying quietly, she was. Oh,

very attached to that monster. But a brave, sensible girl, knowing what had to be done.

We switched off our lamps. Hand in hand, on tiptoe, we crept from that mighty vault. Noiselessly we went up the long passage that led to the daylight.

But it was no good. Before we had even reached the cave's entrance we heard the patter of enormous great feet. We felt a cold breath on our cheek. With sinking hearts we turned round. Two pairs of beady eyes regarded us with simpering devotion. Two wet snouts nuzzled Bronwen's hand. Two sleek bodies stood panting in the darkness.

Our hearts sank even further. Chosen himself a mate, Waldo had . . .

No room even to peg the clothes out, now, in the Price's yard. A broken man, Bronwen's da began to look. One marine monster had been a burden. Two were a disaster.

Not the only one with problems, though, that Mr. Price. Got them myself, with the passing years.

Growing up, me. No longer a schoolboy, playing tag one minute and kissing the next; a young man, now, turning his mind to matrimony, very serious. And if you saw that Bronwen you would not be surprised. Beautiful, she was, with a dark, smiling beauty that had me longing for the day when I could make her my wife.

Well, not much problem, there, you will say. But what about the Waldos? Bronwen it was who had brought them both home, remember. So not much doubt that, when Bronwen left, her da would take good care the sea serpents went with her. Not one to remain saddled with another man's responsibilities, that Mr. Price, and who shall blame him?

But I was not relishing taking on the Waldos. Worse than marrying a widow with six. Yet madly in love with Bronwen at the same time.

Difficult.

Put the problem to Bronwen, I did. "Marrying you, girl," I said, "would be heaven. But can't expect a man to marry a menagerie, as well."

No shame, that girl. Wound her arms round my neck, kissed me on the lips. "Going to marry you all the same, Alun my love, whatever you say, serpents or no serpents."

"See about that, we will," I said, unwinding her arms, yet damn near dying for love of her. And her still smiling her secret smile like that old Mona Lisa.

A month later it was when she led me into her da's garden.

And there was a surprise. Empty, it was, except for a rabbit in a hutch. And who minds an old rabbit?

"But—but where are they?" I asked.

Still smiling her secret smile was Bronwen. Pulled some newspaper cuttings out of her handbag.

"*Loch Ness Monster Appears After Long Absence*," said one.

"*Are There Two Monsters?*" demanded another. But a third published a photograph.

There, unmistakably, sporting in those northern waters, were Waldo and Mrs. Waldo.

"But how did you get them there?" I asked.

Took my arm, did my lovely Bron.

"Just wrote to my press-photographer cousin in Inverness. Said I hoped their monster wasn't dead, but we hadn't heard much about him lately. Mentioned that we had two lying about in the backyard, doing nothing." She went on, "Two days later a couple of pantechnicons arrived. Loaded up and away in ten minutes flat.

"An enterprising and businesslike race, the Scots," said my beloved.

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"How many times must I ask you not to bring your work home with you?"

The Impostors:

Sir RICHARD SMYTH

by

GERALD SPARROW

THE temptation to become a great impostor is far less urgent today than it was in 1849. The great gulf which then existed between the rich aristocracy and the peasants has now become a mere gap between landowners who have to bear a crushing burden of taxation and well-paid artisans whose education, health, and old age is cared for by an increasingly solicitous society.

A hundred and twenty short years ago the circumstances were very different. The aristocracy moved in a world of its own, a golden world of wealth and spacious living, with a great country estate as well as a house in London. In the case of the greatest families, of course, the London house was but part of a London estate. And these vast urban properties have survived into our own day. If you visit the Grosvenor Estate offices in Davies Street you may see the sedan-chair in which their Graces of Westminster were carried through the streets of London, a chair that bears the Grosvenor Crown with its strawberry leaves, and a vase for the flowers to mitigate the stench of the smaller London streets. Moreover, on the wall of the fine, panelled waiting-room is a map that shows the Grosvenor Estates, almost intact today, stretching right down from Eaton Square, through Pimlico, to the river.

When change does come, memories are short. My first club in London, in Stratton Street, overlooked the garden of a still-standing Devonshire House. On a summer evening a nightingale really would sing there in its oasis within a few hundred yards of Piccadilly Circus.

In 1849 few estates were more desirable than that of the Smyth family at Ashton Hall, not far from the thriving, thrusting

West Indies port of Bristol. The Smyth title was a baronetcy and the land they owned, rich farming and fruit land as well as considerable areas that could be developed for building, brought in an income, almost untaxed, of forty thousand pounds a year, to the baronet of the day. It was an immense fortune, equivalent to at least two hundred thousand pounds a year today, the income of a fortunate millionaire. But, in fact, no modern income represents the wealth and the privilege that the Smyth family commanded. It stands to reason that when an empire such as this was challenged by any pretender, those who were in possession fought and fought and fought again to protect their inheritance.

When Sir John Smyth died in 1849 there appeared to be no heir, and Sir John's sister, Florence, became a very wealthy woman by inheriting the great estate which was devised to her if her elder brother Sir Hugh died without issue.

Excitement was not confined to the West Country, but was nationwide when it was discovered that a man calling himself Sir Richard Hugh Smyth was now bringing an action of ejectment to recover for himself his "rightful inheritance." This man claimed to be the son of Sir Hugh by Jane, a daughter of Count Vandenberg, whom it was said Sir Hugh had married secretly in Ireland.

The claim took the Smyth family by surprise. They were horrified. It was a most unlikely story, but it might be true; that was the horrifying possibility. If it were true, then Florence and all her relatives would be reduced, at best, to the position of poor relations of the new Sir Richard. That was a prospect too terrible to contemplate. But the family had to contemplate it. They had to fight hard, using their wealth to employ the best lawyers of the day.

Unfortunately, Sir Richard had what appeared to be a very good case. He was a fair, aristocratic-looking man with a very long nose, and the portraits of the late Sir Hugh showed him in his early thirties as being a fair, aristocratic-looking man with a very long nose, the Smyth nose, that seemed to stamp this family with its monstrous hallmark as if some interested deity was determined that no false usurper should ever pass himself off as a Smyth.

Moreover, Sir Richard did not deny that he had been brought up as Thomas Provis, the son of a carpenter at Warminster in Wiltshire, though in circumstances that were peculiar. He had had a nursemaid, it was said, as a baby, which he would never have had if indeed he had been the carpenter's son, and he possessed a collection of corroborative evidence in the form of

documents, rings, seals, and portraits which, if they were genuine, seemed to lend great weight to his claim.

From the point of view of the agitated Florence and her friends, it was the marriage in Ireland that worried them. If Sir Hugh had really married Jane, he could well have had a son by her; and if he wished to keep the marriage secret, might he not wish to keep the son secret, too? It was the practice of travelling young men of fashion to take any girl who caught their fancy, but in these cases the illegitimate offspring gave little trouble. They were removed by their bar sinister from the direct line of inheritance, and a very modest settlement could usually be arrived at by the legal gentlemen. The lawyers were adept at browbeating young mothers of the lower classes who could often be persuaded that they had committed a crime by being unmarried mothers and that they were very lucky to receive a pittance, due entirely to the generosity of the family.

The Irish marriage haunted the Smyth family. The records were not conclusive, but there was a record of a Smyth marriage, and to prove that this was not Sir Hugh—who had often stayed for long periods in Ireland—became a nightmare to them.

The circumstances of Sir John's death worried them as well. For the day before he died, Thomas Provis had obtained an interview with Sir John and been well received. What passed between the two men we shall never know. In the morning-room of Ashton Hall they talked alone for over an hour. Then Thomas Provis left, happy and smiling. Next morning Sir John was found dead in his four-poster bed—the excitement of the visit, it was thought, had been too much for him. But why should Sir John be so disturbed and excited if Thomas Provis were not his brother's son? He was a man of the world. He was a man of wealth and authority. If Thomas was an impudent impostor, why was he not thrown out?

The Smyth family had much to worry about when, at last, in the calendar at the Michaelmas Assize at Gloucester Assizes, the case of *Thomas Provis claiming to be Sir Richard Hugh Smyth against Florence Smyth and the Smyth Estate* was called for hearing.

The judge was that gracious, urbane, and temperate figure, Lord Coleridge. At first sight his lordship looked positively innocent, so warm and engaging was his personality. But when, in evidence, something was said that appeared dubious or even untrue, his lordship's right eyebrow would raise itself until his whole expression changed to one of stark incredulity. This somewhat alarming transformation was to be witnessed

more than once before the case of *Smyth v. Smyth* reached its surprising and shocking conclusion.

At first the case took a quiet but remarkable complexion. The press of England were there to hear the convincing story unfold.

The Marchioness of Bath, it appeared, had advanced the plaintiff £1,500 to bring these proceedings.

Why the Marchioness should have done this was never made clear, but the lawyers for the Smyth family did not hesitate to suggest that the wily Thomas had wormed his way into the affections of the Marchioness who, in any case, was said to bear a grudge against the Smyth dynasty—one of those festering, enduring West Country grudges that seem, to this day, to thrive in the mild, damp climate around Exeter and Bath.

Meanwhile Thomas, or Sir Richard, was giving his evidence, and every inch an aristocrat he looked in the box. His plum silk coat set off his figure to perfection. His ruffles had just that air of nonchalant grandeur which men of fashion sought but did not always achieve. If there was a pause in the proceedings, Sir Richard would take snuff from a silver snuffbox bearing the Smyth crest, while on the fourth finger of his left hand he wore the Smyth signet-ring. It was perfect, but was it too perfect? Was this man a genuine claimant or a consummate actor?

Witnesses may lie and lie convincingly, but the proof of circumstances, of the little things that time and custom have created without knowing the future, is often stronger, more reliable, less easily explained away. Murderers have been convicted before now by a stain, a letter, a scarf, a burn. The lawyers of Sir Richard called a nice collection of circumstantial evidence in support of their client's claim.

Documents, family relics, seals, rings, and portraits were all put in evidence by the claimant. The documents were remarkable. They purported to bear the signature of the late Sir John and they acknowledged in a straightforward way that Thomas was indeed Sir Richard, the son of Hugh Smyth. The signatures were never disproved. They remain to this day the most puzzling part of the conflicting evidence in this extraordinary case.

Sir Richard in the witness-box was firm and correct in his answers to his own counsel. He told of his meeting with the late Sir John, of the dead man's extreme agitation when he realised he was talking to his brother's son. To calm him, the witness said, "I told him that I had not come to claim my inheritance, but only to arrive at a suitable financial settlement." To

this proposal, apparently, Sir John agreed, saying that he would have his lawyers work out the details.

The next day, as we know, Sir John was found dead. For years the new Sir Richard tried to bring his claim, but no legal firm would touch the case without money in advance. They were being asked to fight against wealth and established authority, and this they would not do without money in their hands.

Sir Richard said he had almost despaired when he met the Marchioness of Bath who, out of the goodness of her heart and because she was convinced he was in fact Sir Richard Hugh Smyth, agreed to finance him.

Sir Richard did not fare so well in cross-examination. He admitted he had been a teacher and lecturer for a number of years using the name of Dr. Smyth. Why doctor? He was not a doctor, was he? No, he was not. John Provis—whom the Smyth family said was the claimant's father—had pointed to a portrait of Sir Hugh and said, "That's your father, boy."

But these rings and seals? Had he ordered some seals to be engraved by a Mr. Moring? There were spelling errors in the seals that tallied with the errors in the late Sir Hugh's marriage contract—had the seals been copied from the contract? No? Will you swear that these seals and rings have been in your possession always? I do swear it.

At this point an incident occurred that spectators described as one of the most dramatic they had seen in a court of law. A telegram was handed to defending counsel. It was from London. The urgency of the new and novel communication in itself stirred the interest of the court. The spectators held their breath to catch what this might mean for the man in the witness-box.

Counsel, speaking slowly and with great solemnity, said, "Did you or did you not in January last apply to a person at 361 Oxford Street to engrave for you a crest on the rings you have produced?"

The witness turned pale and almost broke down. Yet his answer was audible. "I did."

The hounds of the law scented the kill now and they pursued their man remorselessly, reducing him to a gibbering, ineffectual liar. The snuffbox was forgotten. The silken coat had shrunk, the swagger of the aristocrat was there no longer. Less than an hour later Lord Coleridge gave judgment for the defendants. The claim of Sir Richard Hugh Smyth had failed.

The plaintiff was committed there and then on a charge of perjury, to which, later, was added a charge of forgery. In the following spring Thomas Provis stood his trial at the same

Assizes. He was convicted largely because the engravers of the rings and seals came forward to give evidence that the work had been done quite recently and at the plaintiff's request.

The trial did provide one moment of high drama. With the net closing in on him, the prisoner, "with an air of triumph, produced an enormous pigtail which up to this moment had been kept concealed under his coat, and turning round with a flourish he displayed this appendage to the jury, showing it as absolute proof of his aristocratic birth." But this grand gesture of an English mandarin could not save Thomas Provis. He was sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation—and was never heard of again.

After the verdict, evidence was called that he had been a pervert and horse-thief and his degradation was complete.

Everyone was happy except the wretched prisoner, now shackled for his journey across the world to the slave-labour camps of Australia. Justice, it was said, had been done. A great family had been saved from a cheating and impudent impostor. But was the whole truth ever revealed?

I am one of those who think that the real truth concerning Sir Richard Hugh Smyth may well have been different. Those who met the man at the time said that he himself was clearly convinced that he was Sir Richard. Perhaps he was. If also he was a liar and a cheat, might he not have had the seals and rings made to bolster up the genuine evidence in his possession which he feared might prove inadequate? Litigants have made the same mistake before, and they will do so again.

Certain facts were never disproved. If he was a son of a carpenter, why should he look like a Smyth? How did the genuine signatures of the late Sir Hugh Smyth come to be on those documents that acknowledged his claim? Why was the Marchioness of Bath so sure of his right that she paid out very large sums to enable him to bring his action?

The complexities of human nature and of human conduct are infinite in their variation and, though one can well understand the verdicts both in the civil action for ejectment and in the criminal trial for fraud and forgery, it may well be that Thomas Provis, petty criminal, was in fact Sir Richard Hugh Smyth. This personal opinion does not alter the facts of the verdicts, nor the savage punishment of the law.

Did Sir Richard take his pigtail with him to Australia? Are there any Provises there today? Or any Smyths?

I like to think that he survived, perhaps to found a family and redeem the grim remorseless story of his double encounter with the law.

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WATER FROLICS

Our old salt, Horatio, often gets letters from Argosy readers, but he is a bit baffled by this anonymous little lot. Can you guess the identity of the writers ? If you're all at sea or sold down the river, turn to page 90

1. My life seems to be just one round of doing other people's dirty work. The current labour is to clean out some particularly disgusting stables. I think the most effective way would be to divert a nearby river through them. Should I approach the Water Board first ?

2. My hobby is boat-building, but my wife takes no interest. Can you help me persuade her that it might come in useful some day, as I believe in togetherness ?

3. My father expects me to accompany him when he flies from Crete to Greece in the summer. I am nervous of flying; should I take swimming lessons just in case ?

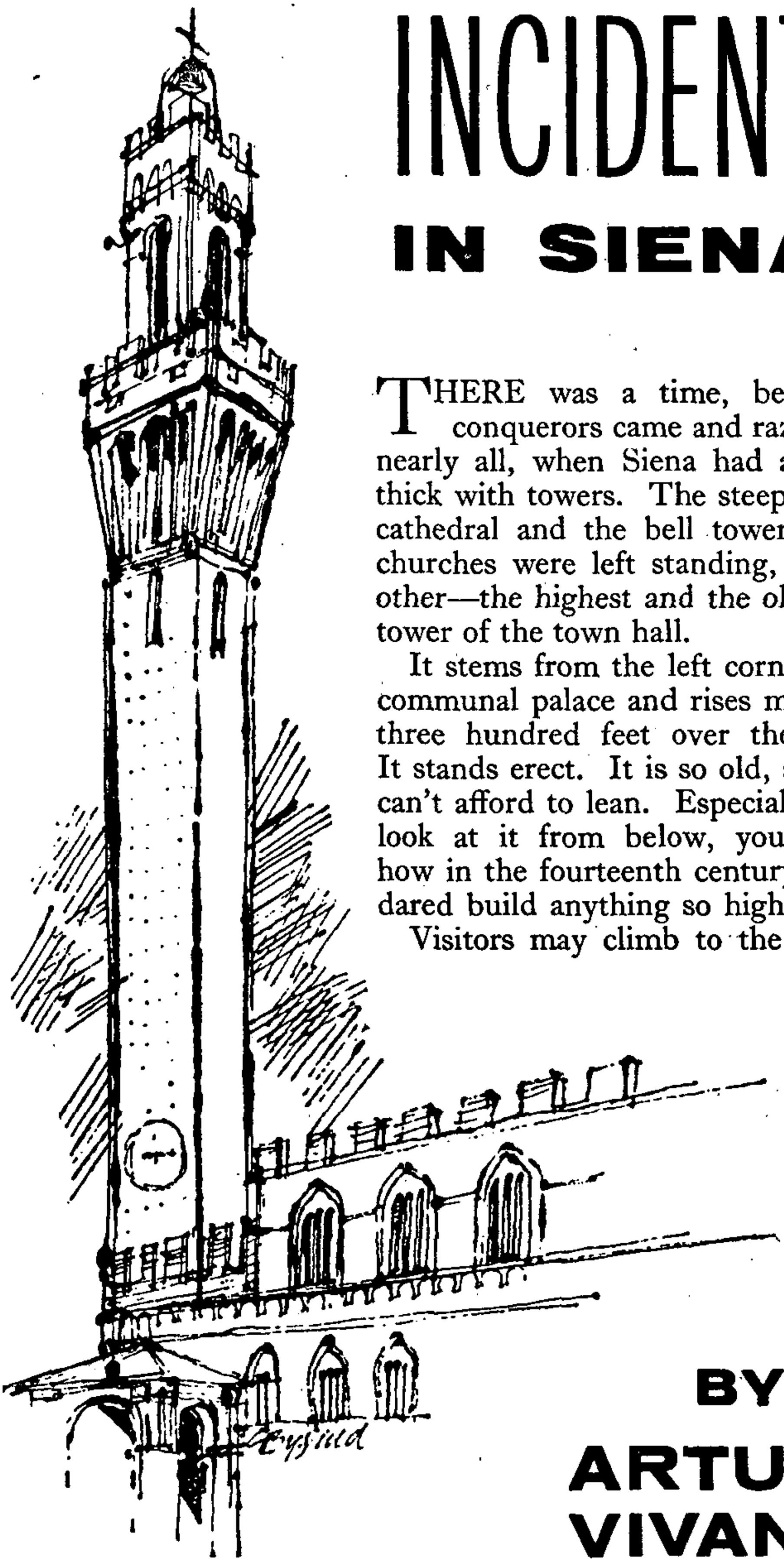
4. My plans to build a casino over a river have been thwarted because it seems I unknowingly walled round ten miles of the green belt. Now I've met this girl who plays the dulcimer. Should I settle down or find another site for my holiday camps ?

5. Last week a man came prying round the pool where I was bathing. I resented his intrusion and had him chased away. Friends tell me no one bothers about that sort of thing these days. Am I being old-fashioned ?

6. Readers of your column, who like me cannot get out and about as they used to, might like to know of a device I thought up. Why not hang a large mirror on the wall opposite the window ? Then you can see the passing pageant of the world outside without moving from your favourite chair.

7. I have fallen for the most beautiful person. We meet by a pool in the forest, and though I try to open conversation I get absolutely no response—I might as well be talking to myself. What should I do ? I am considered quite good-looking.

8. While on a voyage recently we were invited, the crew and myself, to join a party being given by some girls sitting on a nearby rock. We were tempted, as we all enjoy a good sing-song, but had to press on. Was this rude ?



INCIDENT IN SIENA

THERE was a time, before the conquerors came and razed them nearly all, when Siena had a skyline thick with towers. The steeple of the cathedral and the bell towers of the churches were left standing, and one other—the highest and the oldest, the tower of the town hall.

It stems from the left corner of the communal palace and rises more than three hundred feet over the piazza. It stands erect. It is so old, so tall, it can't afford to lean. Especially if you look at it from below, you wonder how in the fourteenth century anyone dared build anything so high.

Visitors may climb to the top. A

BY ARTURO VIVANTE

little door at the foot of the tower, in the courtyard of the town hall, opens into a small zigzagging stone stairway. A short distance up, a passage leads from it into the palace and the ticket office. You go up a flight of steps to a terrace, where a door brings you back into the zigzagging stairway of the tower.

Here there is even less room than below, and you hope you won't meet someone coming down. The walls are so thick and the space so scanty you feel you are inside the hollow core of a great tree. The stairway widens somewhat farther up. It changes as you climb. No step is like the next one. Only the thickness of the walls, seen through narrow openings that show the sky, seems constant. Within them you feel secure.

The tower was begun in 1325 and raised as the commune grew bolder. In 1345, at the peak of its glory, the tower reached its present height. From the piazza, if you look closely, you may see, marked by a slight but abrupt change in the colour of the bricks, the outlines of former stages.

The stairs zigzag round a hollow shaft. This is the very core, the pith, of the tower. Through it run two big ropes, used to ring the bells that hang in the turret above. With them, in an emergency, the government of Siena could put the whole town and the countryside around it in a state of alarm. I've heard their plangent, deep, dramatic tone, and almost felt the waves of sound. The sound carried me centuries back to when it meant something and didn't just strike a hollow and empty note.

Slits in the walls, and at intervals narrow, tall windows with a pointed arch bring air and light. Most other towers have dark monotonous stairways that make you despair of ever coming to the top. Here, instead, you reach it sooner than you think.

The red bricks of the stem blossom into travertine, white machicolations, and the stairway opens on to a crenellated terrace. There is a view of hills and mountains, of the cathedral and the roofs of the town. If you lean over the crenels on one side, you see the red brick square below, radiated like an open fan.

A tall, arched stone bell tower rises from the terrace. You may climb this, too, past the bells it lodges, to a second terrace, and go still higher, up to a platform that supports a weather vane and yet another bell.

I have climbed the tower twice in my life—the first time in my childhood, the second recently. I should really say that I've been up three times, for when I recently climbed it something happened that made me go up again as soon as I had come down.

It was a sunny winter day. I had gone up and down the tower, and felt pleased with myself for having taken this initiative, when,

outside the little door at the foot, a blind man came towards me. He was a pale thin man, with sparse black hair and dark glasses that gave him an impenetrable look. He kept close to the inner wall of the courtyard, grazing it with his arm. On reaching the door, he touched the jamb and sharply turned inside. In a moment, he disappeared up the staircase.

I stood still, looking at the empty space left by the open door, and at the little plaque that said TO THE TOWER nailed to the wall. I felt compelled to follow.

I didn't follow closely. I caught up with him in the ticket office. There I was surprised to see the attendant selling him a ticket as though he were any other visitor. The man fumbled for it, sweeping a little space of desk with his hand until he had it, but the attendant didn't seem to take any notice. Then, with the ticket in one hand and touching the wall with the fingers of the other, he reached the staircase leading to the terrace.

I stood by the desk, watching him until he was out of earshot. "That man is blind," I said to the attendant, and expected him to show some concern, but he just looked at me with his sleepy eyes. He was a heavy man who seemed all one piece with his chair and desk. "He's blind," I repeated.

He looked at me vacantly.

"What would a blind man want to climb up the tower for?" I asked. He didn't answer.

"Not the view, certainly," I said. "Perhaps he wants to jump."

His mouth opened a little. Should he do something? The weight of things was against him. He didn't stir. "Well, let's hope not," he said, and looked down at a crossword puzzle he had begun.

The blind man was out of sight. I turned towards the stairs.

"The ticket," the attendant said, rising from his chair. It seemed the only thing that could move him.

I handed him a fifty-lira piece, and he detached a ticket from his book. Then I hurried up the staircase.

The man hadn't gone as far as I imagined. Much less time had passed than I thought. A third of the way up the tower, I heard his step. I slowed down and followed him at a little distance. He went up slowly, and stopped from time to time. When he got to the terrace, I was a dozen steps behind. But as I reached it, he wasn't to be seen. I dashed to the first corner of the bell tower, round the next, and saw him.

He was facing the cathedral, and had I not known that he was blind I would have said he was enjoying the view. Soon he withdrew from the crenel and began walking towards me. He

touched the wall, not like one who is groping in the dark but as the blind do. Their fingers touch objects lightly. If they use a cane, this seems alive, a part of them, as sensitive and sharp as a cat's whisker.

I moved out of his way, and he passed by me. When I had seen him below he had seemed eager, taut, and in a hurry. Now he looked as though he had found what he wanted. His gait was calm, and his face had lost its tautness. He ambled over to the other side of the terrace. I didn't feel anxious about him any more, just mystified. Often he stopped, retraced a few steps, then went on again. Sometimes he seemed to expose himself to the light breeze, sometimes to take shelter behind a merlon. He climbed up to the second terrace. I went, too. We lingered there, he strolling about, I looking at the view.

At last, after ten minutes, I approached him. "Excuse me," I said with the greatest courtesy I could summon, "but I am very curious to know why you came up."

"You'd never guess," he said.

"Not the view, I take it, or the fresh air on this winter day."

"No," he said, and he assumed the amused expression of one who poses a puzzle.

"Tell me," I said.

He smiled. "Perhaps, coming up the stairs, you will have noticed—and yet, not being blind, perhaps you won't—how not just light but sun pours into the tower through the narrow, slit-like windows here and there, so that one can feel the change—the cool staircase suddenly becomes quite warm, even in winter—and how up here behind the merlons there is shade, but as soon as one goes opposite a crenel one finds the sun. In all Siena there is no place so good as this for feeling the contrast between light and shade. It isn't the first time that I've come up."

He stepped into the shade. "I am in the shade," he said. "There is a merlon there." He moved into the sunlight. "Now I am opposite a crenel," he said. We went down the bell tower.

"An arch is there," he said.

"You never miss. And the sun isn't even very strong," I said.

"Strong enough." He added, "Now I'm behind a bell."

Coming back down on to the terrace, he went round it. "Light, shade, light, shade," he said, and seemed as pleased as a child who, in a game of hopscotch, jumps from square to square.

We went down the tower together. "A window there," he said, up near the top. "Another window," he said, when we were halfway down.

I left him, gladdened as one can only be by the sunlight.

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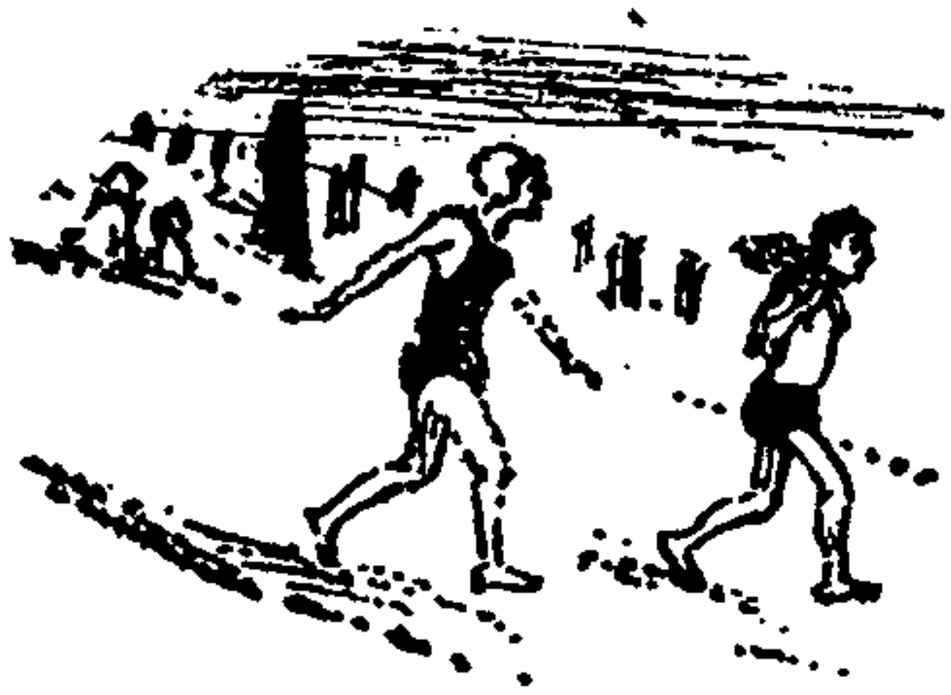

In the SWIM

Love the sea? I dote upon it—from the beach.

DOUGLAS JERROLD

How pleasant to sit on the beach,
On the beach, on the beach, in the sun,
With ocean galore within reach,
And nothing at all to be done!
No letters to answer,
No bills to be burned,
No work to be shirked,
No cash to be earned.
It is pleasant to sit on the beach
With nothing at all to be done.

How pleasant to look at the ocean,
Democratic and damp; indiscriminate;
It fills me with noble emotion
To think I am able to swim in it.
To lave in the wave,
Majestic and chilly,
Tomorrow I crave;
But today it is silly.
It is pleasant to look at the ocean;
Tomorrow, perhaps, I shall swim in it.

OGDEN NASH, *Pretty Halcyon Days*

Seascape

August Bank Holiday. A tune on an ice-cream cornet. A slap of sea and a tickle of sand. A fanfare of sunshades opening. A wince and whinny of bathers dancing into deceptive water. A tuck of dresses. A rolling of trousers. A compromise of paddlers. A sunburn of girls and a lark of boys. A silent hullabaloo of balloons.

I remember the sea telling lies in a shell held to my ear for a whole harmonious, hollow minute by a small, wet girl in

an enormous bathing suit marked " Corporation Property " . . .
And mothers loudly warned their proud pink daughters or sons to put that jellyfish down; and fathers spread newspapers over their faces; and sandfleas hopped on the picnic lettuce; and someone had forgotten the salt.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Quite Early One Morning*

There splashed about our ankles as we waded
Those interesting wavelets morning-cold,
And sudden dark a patch of sea was shaded,
And sudden light, another patch would hold
The warmth of whirling atoms in a sun-shot
And underwater sandstorm green and gold.
So in we dived and louder than a gunshot
Sea-water broke in fountains down the ear.
How cold the bathe, how chattering cold the drying,
How welcoming the inlet reeds appear,
The woodsmoke and the breakfast and the frying,
And your warm freshwater ripples, Horsey Mere.

JOHN BETJEMAN, *East Anglian Bathe*

Beach Encounter

My affair with Lucy, like some of the world's great passions, had blossomed delicately on a patch of prickly dislike. I happened to pinch her bucket, so she hit me over the ear with her spade. Then she kidnapped the special crab I was keeping to put in her brother's bed, so I slid an ice-cream down her neck. The tiff went on for ages—quite three whole sunlit days—until the afternoon I first discovered that a chap can go too far, when I jumped on her sandcastle with the real battlements and launched poor Lucy into a sea of tears. Luckily, I shortly afterwards had a chance to display my finer qualities by removing a bee from her neck, even though I did happen to know myself it was one of the sort which didn't sting. After that, I showed her my collection of dead men's fingers and she gave me a jellyfish, and there was no holding us.

RICHARD GORDON, *Doctor in the Swim*

Dampening Effect

No one enjoys more than I do
The pleasures of the swimming pool, or Lido
When I lie on the concrete bordering this municipal moisture
The world is my oisture.
I do not talk, or read novels of detection,
No, what deep water produces in me is deep reflection . . .
Surrounded by laughing bathers, I am as old as Tiresias or Gerontius
I swim through a green and chlorinated Unconscious,
I love all men—
but what is this?
Two golden men and a golden miss
Seem to think they're admired by all
For their solemn game with a medicine ball;
They stand in poses we all have seen
On the covers of many a health magazine,
It's clear they think, from their graces and airs,
We wish we could all have bodies like theirs.
Sooner or later they drop their catches,
The wet ball lands on my pipe and matches;
My dreams no longer hatch out from their eggs
When gymnasts trip on my outstretched legs.
The view I take of their sport is dim,
I crossly rise and dive in for a swim—
But here again I am far from solo,
I come up for air in a game of polo . . .
Too late! too late! I was just a fool
To think I could dream at a swimming pool.

PAUL JENNINGS, *In the Swim*

Plunge Line

The morning was of a lovely limpid gold colour. Veils of shadow seemed to be drifting away on the north and the south. Clara stood shrinking slightly from the touch of the wind, twisting her hair. The sea-grass rose behind the white stripped woman. She glanced at the sea, then looked at him. He was watching her with dark eyes which she loved and could not understand. She hugged her breasts between her arms, cringing, laughing:

"Oo, it will be so cold!" she said.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Sons and Lovers*

SANCTUARY FOR THE GENERAL

"You must do something for Galloper," said Poppy

BY VICTOR CANNING

MAJOR-GENERAL Sir Henry Braithwaite, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., known to his friends as Galloper, was having breakfast. *The Times* was propped against the coffee pot, and he was spreading marmalade on his toast with a thin-bladed pygmy hunting-knife which had come from the Ituri forests of the Congo. The May morning sunshine streamed through the mullioned windows of the breakfast-room of Lambertill Hall and there was a lingering aroma of kippers in the air. Kippers were Sir Henry's favourite breakfast food, and the two he had just finished were the first he had had in eighteen months.

The General was a fine, intimidating figure of a man. His fair hair was now thin and whitening, his blue eyes clear and frank against a suntanned complexion, and his beaked Roman nose presided over a fierce cavalry moustache. As the chairman of a committee, a justice of the peace, or a judge at a horse show, the General stood no nonsense from anyone. In fact, it would have been difficult for the General to remember the last time he had ever stood any nonsense from anyone in any walk of life. He snorted now at a piece of nonsense in the third leader and threw the paper to the floor just as his man, Murch, came into the room. Murch—once Trooper Murch—was the only indoor servant the General could afford.

"Timms, sir, is outside, sir, waiting to see you," said Murch.

"Timms? What does he want? I said I'd walk round with him this afternoon."

"He said something about the bulldozer, sir."

"The bulldozer? What are you talking about, Murch?"

"The bulldozer, sir."

"I heard you the first time. But what bulldozer?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. I don't meddle with the outside things. I've enough to do in here, sir."

The General cocked an eye at Murch, but wisely did not

pursue this aspect of the conversation. Murch, gloomy, sardonic, but utterly faithful to the General, had been agitating in his own peculiarly devious way for two years to get the General to buy him a washing-up machine. Actually, the General might have been able, with a little pinching here and there, to run to a washing-up machine. But the real snag was that there was no electricity at Lambertill Hall.

"Excellent kippers, Murch. Excellent. If it's possible, your touch has improved while I've been away."

The General got up and went out, a tall well-built figure in shooting-jacket and breeches. Timms was waiting for him in the driveway, a shotgun crooked under his arm. Timms—once Trooper Timms—was the outside man, the gardener and game-keeper of two-hundred-odd acres—all that was now left of the Lambertill estate, the rest having long been sold to pay taxes.

These two hundred acres of wild heath, woodland, and marsh, running down to the North Sea, the General had turned into a bird sanctuary. Ornithology was the passion of the General's life. The only shooting that was ever done on the Lambertill Estate was of vermin, like rats and squirrels, that plagued the nesting birds. After a lifetime of warfare in various parts of the globe the General had become, in his own way, a man of peace.

"Morning, Timms. What the devil's all this about a bull-dozer?"

"Morning, General. It's the bulldozer for the new road, sir. Thought you'd like to know they're making a start."

"Bulldozer? What road?"

"The new road, sir. Coming in by the quarry copse they are, off the Lamindon road."

"What the devil is this?" The General's blue eyes glinted fiercely. "My gold-crested wrens nest every year in the pines down there. Come on, man—let's get to the bottom of this. New road! Has someone gone mad while I've been away?"

The General strode off, followed by Timms.

Half a mile from the Hall, where the country road to the small town of Lamindon bordered the estate, there was a clump of pines at the side of an old quarry. As they approached, the General saw that a man was busy pulling up a length of chestnut paling, while another man sat in the driving-seat of a bulldozer waiting to move in. Somebody, the General noticed in fury, had stuck a row of surveyor's red-and-white stakes across the ground running from the quarry into the estate.

Seeing the man busy on his chestnut paling, the General took the gun from Timms and fired a couple of shots into the air, well above the man's head. The man sat back, surprised, into

the ditch and was still sitting there when the General arrived.

"What the devil do you two think you're doing?" roared the General, and Timms, hearing the thunder in his voice, was taken back to his days in tanks when the General had commanded an Armoured Division.

The man pulled himself from the ditch and said petulantly, "You shot at me!"

"Don't talk damned nonsense, man! I shot over you. What's going on here?"

The man on the bulldozer took a cigarette from his mouth and said amiably, "The new road, General. Cuts right across to Lambertill beach and then on to Sandfields. We've just got to make an entrance for the lorries and other stuff to get in. Nice to see you back, General."

For a moment the General looked in silence from one man to the other. Like a good tactician he made a quick appreciation of the situation, and arrived at two conclusions: one, nobody was taking down his fence and driving a bulldozer through his land, and, two, this outrage had to be tackled at source.

He snorted and said commandingly, "Timms, stay here. If either of them lays a hand on that fence or tries to drive that machine in—shoot."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll go and find out about this."

The amiable man on the bulldozer nodded. "That's right, General. But it won't do you any good. All signed and sealed, it is."

"Then it will all be unsigned and unsealed, my man!"

The General turned and strode off, fuming. His land, his birds, all to be mucked up with a new road to Lambertill beach and Sandfields when there was already a perfectly good—if longer—road running round the back of the estate!

Half an hour later he drove into Lamindon in his open, vintage "Phantom II" Rolls-Royce, intent on visiting his solicitor. As he parked his car in front of the Town Hall, a young constable came up to him.

"Sorry, sir—you can't park your car there. New regulation. Reserved for the Mayor and council members."

This was the last straw to the General.

"Listen, young man," he said, "I've been parking my car there for years, and before I had a car I parked my bicycle there, and my grandfather parked his penny-farthing there before me. Give the Mayor my compliments and tell him and the town council to sue me and be damned! Now, don't delay me any longer!"

He strode off to the offices of Wench, Welton, and Barnhill, Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths, leaving the young constable open-mouthed.

A few minutes later he crashed into Harvey Wench's office. Harvey, a pleasant, competent young man, had served under the General in World War II, and now handled all the General's legal affairs.

"Good morning, General. You're just in time for a glass of sherry."

"I don't want sherry, young feller. I want an explanation. What have you been up to, you nincompoop? What is all this about a new road to Sandfields through my place? A new road —right across one of the finest stretches of country around here. Disturbing my bittern and shrike! What have you been doing while I've been away?"

Harvey waited for the gale to subside and then said patiently, "But, General—I wrote to you about this while you were away. It's part of the new county development scheme for Lambertill beach and Sandfields. The Minister has given his consent—after a public hearing.

"Surely you remember? You sent me a telegram telling me to go ahead. It only cuts across a corner of your land and you get—I must say this—very handsome compensation."

"I don't care a fig for the compensation. I'm thinking of my bird sanctuary. And what letter? What telegram? I didn't get any letters in the Ituri forest. D'you think there's a postal service in the middle of the Congo? And the only telegram I sent you was about those shares of mine you were fussing over before I left—those property holdings. I changed my mind and wired you before I went up-country—GO THROUGH WITH PROPERTY DEAL MENTIONED BY YOU."

Harvey's face fell. "Oh dear—there's been a ghastly mix-up. I thought your telegram was an answer to my letter."

"I don't care what you or anyone else thought! Just tell the county people to haul off their bulldozers. I'm not selling any more of my land. Anyone who wants to go to Lambertill beach can go round by the old road, or across the estate bridlepath. I've never stopped people coming on my place so long as they behave themselves. Encouraged 'em, in fact. But I'm not having any damn road with cars whizzing about, disturbing the birds. In no time they'll be setting up hot-dog stands and lord knows what. Turning the foreshore into a lido or some damn rot like that. People want a sanctuary as much as the birds—and that's what Lambertill is going to remain. A sanctuary."

Harvey shook his head. "It can't be done, General. The whole thing is signed and sealed. You know what these official bodies are like."

"Have you had the cheque for the sale?"

"No."

"Then that's it. I won't accept it. Just tell them the whole thing is off. Phone the County Surveyor now and tell him to recall that bulldozer. Tell him Timms and I will shoot anyone who tries to come in."

"But, General—"

"No buts. Get cracking." The General turned on his heels and left the room before Harvey could say anything.

He went back to his car, and the young constable on duty, watching him drive off, decided that it might be better not to report the parking offence.

That weekend Harvey came over to Lambertill Hall to report progress.

"I'm sorry, General," he said. "But there is nothing we can do. They say they're not responsible for the mistake and they must go ahead."

"What?" The General's roar echoed round the library. "Go ahead, must they? We'll see about that!"

Harvey recognised that the General was now in one of his "Galloper" moods. In other words, when surrounded by the enemy, he was prepared to give his charger its head, draw his sword and, backed by stalwart troopers, cut his way out.

"I'm afraid we're too late," said Harvey nervously. "The Minister has given his authority for this thing, the County Council are all on their toes ready to go, Government grants have been made—"

"And the whole thing has been a mistake. I've never given permission and I never will!" exploded the General.

"There was a public inquiry into the affair. They say that you should have objected then."

"How could I? Don't be a blithering idiot! I was in Africa and knew nothing. All they have to do is to see that and cancel everything. But not them. They're so tied up in red tape that once a thing has been settled they've no idea how to unsettle it."

"They don't want to, that's why. And anyway, they can always make a compulsory purchase order against you."

"What? Force me to sell my own land? What is this country—a concentration camp? Don't people have any rights to their own property?"

"Not if they stand in the way of beneficial developments."

"Beneficial! What's beneficial about a new road when there's a perfectly adequate old one? What's beneficial about turning a quiet beach into a jam-packed lido? And what about the hundreds of people who take civilised pleasure in walking round the sanctuary watching the birds, eh? And what about the birds, eh? What about them? Are they going to like it? Do you think any self-respecting godwit, Sandwich tern, or spotted flycatcher is going to nest around here if this road goes through?"

"There isn't a thing I can do, General."

The General snorted and fixed himself a whisky and soda. "Harvey, that's just the spineless kind of thing that you would say. Tie a piece of red tape round something and it becomes sacred to you. If a thing is wrong, it's wrong, and they've got to put it right. I'll make them!"

"What can you do?" Harvey asked.

"Fight them! Right the way up to the top. Already I've told the Chairman of the County Council Highways Committee that he will never be invited to dinner here again, and that his fishing syndicate's lease on Lambertill lake will not be renewed next year unless all work is suspended for a month."

"He agreed?"

"He had to. I've got a month's respite. I'm going to London on Monday to see Bunty Haggerty."

"Who's he?"

"Bunty? He used to be a pimple-faced squirt at Charterhouse with me. Used to make him do my Latin and Greek prep for me. Odd blighter—never played games. Always poking round old churches, digging up flint arrowheads. Mad on archaeology. At the moment he happens to be the Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty, M.P., member of Her Majesty's Cabinet and Minister of Rural Transport and Civil Aviation. Don't ask me why. He probably thinks a Sopwith Camel was something with four legs, and he's the fool who's given permission for roads to be plastered all over the country in places where people don't want 'em."

And on Monday the General motored to London and went to see the Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty.

It was no tender reunion. Bunty, a short, plump, and rather pompous man, was polite—hiding successfully a long-ingrained nervousness of the Galloper's pugnacious manner—but he could offer no balm. The scheme was all settled and must go through.

"Bunty," fumed the General, "I'm warning you that I'm not taking no for an answer. This is going higher. Where's the P.M.? I'll see him."

"The Prime Minister is in Paris. He doesn't get back for a week. There's nothing you can do, General. Believe me."

"We'll see. How the devil would you like someone driving a road across your ground?"

"If it were in the national interest I should submit gracefully."

"Then you'd be a fool. National interest. That's what they always say when they have no real argument. Right—then I'll go above the P.M."

"I should like to know where."

"Then I'll tell you." And the General mentioned the name of a Very High Royal Person indeed.

For a moment Bunty's face paled. "You know him?"

"As good as. Damn it, I nearly married his wife, didn't I? When I was a subaltern, Poppy and I were very good friends. But she decided in the end to plump for being a Duchess rather than a camp follower to a warrior. Don't blame her."

And to Poppy the General went. The Duchess, no longer the slim, giggling debutante whom the General had once known, was charmed to see him. He sat in her boudoir and they had tea together and talked over old times, and then they were joined by her husband, the Duke, and to the two of them the General put his problem.

"Bird sanctuary, eh?" said the Duke. "No shootin'?"

"No, sir. Only with a camera."

"Dull, what?"

"Of course it isn't," said the Duchess. "It's much harder to get a good picture of a marsh harrier feeding its young than it is to knock down a couple of high-flying pheasants."

"That so? Interestin'."

"You must do something for Galloper," said Poppy.

"True, my love," said the Duke. "But so far as I can see it's birds, peace, and quiet against a new road. Not much argument there. Some like birds and peace and quiet, and just as many like new roads and noisy beaches. I mean, if they wanted to knock down St. Paul's and make a road through, or Nelson's Column, then there'd be something to work on. But I'll try. Going to Paris tomorrow. Could have a word with the P.M."

Two days later the General had a telephone call from the Duchess to say that the Duke's plea had been sympathetically heard by the Prime Minister, but very diplomatically turned down. This was a departmental matter and not of sufficient national importance to warrant interference from him at this late stage.

Many another man would have taken this as final. But not

Galloper Braithwaite. He brooded on the matter for a whole day, and then in the evening wandered into the kitchen where Murch was washing up. For some time the General said nothing, but he absently took a dishtowel and began to dry the plates. Murch gave him a gloomy look and waited, silently.

After a time the General said, "Murch, how much does one of these washer things cost?"

"About sixty pounds, I think, sir."

"I see."

"There would be the installing of the electricity as well, sir."

"How much?"

"About three hundred pounds, I understand, sir."

"I see."

"Not that I am not content with things as they are, sir. But it is a bit hard on the hands. Always was prone to chapping, sir, as you know. Early morning stables was a nightmare to me sometimes, sir."

"Call it four hundred pounds altogether, eh?" The General grunted. "Well, we might manage it, Murch. We might—if you cooperate."

"Cooperate, sir?"

"In a li.tle scheme. Could be dangerous, though. I mean, it calls for courage and discretion."

"Illegal, sir?" Murch knew the General.

"In a way."

"I'd be delighted, sir. Anything to save my hands, sir."

"Good—then get Timms in here and we'll fix it up."

"Timms, sir?"

"It's an outside as well as an inside job. And I shall need you both to come to London with me the day after tomorrow. A road across my land, eh? Scaring my birds, mucking the place up for decent folk on the beach—I'll show them!"

Two evenings later, at six o'clock, the General walked into the bar of his club, not far from Claridge's Hotel in Brook Street, and found, as he knew he would, Sir James Knowland, the millionaire proprietor of the *Daily World*, contemplating his sixth whisky of the day.

"Evening, Jimmy."

"Evening, Galloper. Whisky?"

"Thank you."

They drank in silence for a while, and then the General said casually, "Tell me, Jimmy—how much would your paper pay for a real scoop?"

"Depends, Galloper. Real big stuff—no limit."

"Indeed. Well, four hundred quid is all a friend of mine wants. First-class story, too. You could just catch the press tonight with it. Absolutely exclusive."

"What is it?"

"Not so fast, Jimmy. First—the money would have to be paid to me, and the whole thing is in strict confidence. After all, the fellow's doing me a great service."

"You sure there is a friend, Galloper?"

"If that's your attitude, I can take this somewhere else."

Sir James Knowland shook his head. "Four hundred to you. Strict confidence. If the story is good."

"Read this."

The General handed over a typewritten sheet to Sir James. Sir James read it, whistled, and broke into a great smile. "No stopping you, is there, Galloper? O.K. Strict confidence. Money in the mail to you tonight. Sorry, I must hurry."

The next morning, at the breakfast tables of those fortunate enough to subscribe to the *Daily World*, the news broke. Within a few hours the wires all over the country and the world were humming with it.

The Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty, M.P., Minister of Rural Transport and Civil Aviation, had been kidnapped, changing for dinner at his house.

An anonymous communication received by the editor of the *Daily World* announced that the kidnapper, an admirer of Major-General Sir Henry Braithwaite, and also a passionate ornithologist and campaigner for the preservation of the rural beauties of England, meant to hold on to the Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty until the scheme to drive a road through the Lambertill Bird Sanctuary was withdrawn. If the scheme were not withdrawn the Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty would never see the light of day again.

The repercussions were many and rapid. The Lambertill road scheme, which had been only of local interest, suddenly became of international interest. The legion of societies for and against planning, for and against new roads, for and against wild life and rural preservation, and so on, went into action with a spate of letters to the press. The manservant of Bunty Haggerty, besieged by reporters; could only say that his master had gone up to change for dinner and had never come down. His black tie was still laid out on the bed, but the rest of his evening clothes had disappeared with him.

Nearer home the exchanges were sharper. Harvey Wench rang the General and told him that he would never get away with it. The General replied, "Don't know what you're talking about.

Nothing to do with me. Damned nice of whoever it was."

The Duchess, staying at a nearby country house, telephoned and said, "Galloper, how like you. So dashing! But it won't do any good. Wrap him up and send him back."

The General thanked her for her interest and invited her to dinner the following weekend.

The Chief Constable of the County, prodded from Scotland Yard—they in turn prodded by the Prime Minister—arrived at Lambertill Hall with a search warrant.

"Hope you haven't got this chap around, Galloper. Look bad for you if I turn him up."

The General, who hunted regularly with the Chief Constable, gave him a glass of sherry and told him to have a good look round. The Chief Constable and his men departed without finding any trace of the Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty.

And there the matter was. A member of Her Majesty's Cabinet missing, an ultimatum issued, the preliminary work for the road halted, and the General, Murch, and Timms going about their business with cheerful unconcern. Yes, even Murch was cheerful, for the General had written to the local contractors for an estimate for installing electricity in the Hall, and Murch was happily collecting brochures of washing-up machines.

Bunty Haggerty was, of course, at Lambertill. His kidnapping had been a matter of no great difficulty to three seasoned campaigners like the General, Murch, and Timms.

Some half a mile from the Hall there was a large range of dunes, a favourite nesting place for sand martins. Here—during World War II—an anti-aircraft gun had been sited. The gun was now long gone, but there remained an old ammunition store which the gunners had dug into the sandy side of the dune and lined with logs. The stout door to the store was now overgrown with a wilderness of tamarisk and gorse bushes and it would have needed the eyes of a hawk to spot it. Here the General visited Bunty each evening after nightfall, accompanied by Timms carrying food and drink for the beleaguered member of Her Majesty's Cabinet.

The General was sitting with him now, an old cavalry sword resting across his knees in case Bunty tried to escape. Timms had retired. Bunty, in evening dress less a black tie, watching the glint of hurricane lamplight on the sword, was openly nervous, but also pugnacious.

"You'll never get away with this, Galloper. You've really put yourself in the soup."

"Pooh and bah!" said the General. "They'll come round.

Every day you stay here, work piles up at your Ministry. They'll have to come round."

"And if they don't?"

"I'll send them first your right ear and then your left. Or the other way round if you prefer it."

"You can't play ducks and drakes with the Government like this. You're mad."

"If the Government can play ducks and drakes with me and my bird sanctuary, I can do the same with them. Trouble with people these days is they won't stand up for their rights against you red-tape-ridden bureaucrats."

The General stood up to go. As he did so, his eye fell on a spade at the far end of the store where the logs holding back the sand had rotted away. Fresh sand lay over the ground. The General cocked an eye at Bunty. "Been digging, I see."

Bunty replied belligerently, "I've a right to try and escape."

"Certainly," said the General. "Duty of every officer when taken prisoner. But you'll never make it that way. Two hundred yards of solid dune. But it's healthy exercise. Good night."

For four days the mystery of the missing Cabinet member obsessed the nation, and for four days various members of the Government and as many of the War Office—old friends of Galloper's, and all convinced that he was holding Bunty Haggerty somewhere—applied pressure in their different ways to make him see sense.

To all of them the General made substantially the same reply. "If the Lambertill road goes through you'll have to get a new Minister. With thousands of others, I fought for this country in its hour of need. I'm not standing by now to see it desecrated by a lot of bureaucratic morons who don't know how to change their minds. They're the kind who've made the dodo and the Cornish red-legged chough extinct, and wouldn't turn a hair if the golden eagle went the same way. Sanctuary is what we need for birds and men."

But in the end a pressure was brought on the General which he could not resist. When the Duchess came to dinner with him that weekend, the Duke came as well. They ate in the long dining-hall by candlelight, and when the port was served Poppy refused to leave the men.

The Duke sipped his glass, held it up to the candlelight, and with that air of wellbeing which comes from good port only, said, "I'm not sure. Could be a Gould-Campbell, 1927."

"Cockburn, '27," said the General. "Only six dozen left. See me out."

The Duke nodded and then said, "Talkin' of seein' you

out . . . might not be long, head on a block, what, and all that—if you hang on to Bunty Haggerty."

Poppy, smiling graciously at the General, said, "You've got to turn him loose, Galloper."

"'Fraid so," said the Duke. "Do it now, no repercussions. Whole matter smoothed over. But the P.M. is worried. Government being made to look foolish. Laughin' stock of the world. Bad for international relations, you know."

The General circulated the port, watched the Duke refill his glass, and realised that he was being given an order; and the order was coming from a man who, in the strict military sense, was his commander.

Sadly, thinking of his birds and of the lovely stretch of wild country which so many people enjoyed in peace and quiet, all now to be changed, he said, "Of course, sir."

Poppy, sorry for him, said, "It was a good try, Galloper, my dear. But these are modern times . . . people don't understand."

"Better get him now," said the Duke. "I'll talk to him and see he doesn't get any ideas about making trouble. Where is he?"

The General told him, and the Duke and Duchess, since it was a fine evening, decided to walk to the dunes with the General.

They found Bunty Haggerty at the back of the store, digging away by the light of two hurricane lamps. For a while he was unaware of their presence.

"Tryin' to escape?" queried the Duke.

The General shook his head. "More for exercise than anything else, sir. Keeps him fit. He's been doing it ever since I put him here. Hey, Bunty!"

The Right Hon. Bernard Willoughby Haggerty turned and, recognising the Duke and Duchess, came forward to be greeted by them. He looked dirty, dishevelled, and exhausted, but there was a curious glint in his eyes.

"Sentence remitted," said the General. "You're free. Come back to the Hall and clean up. Give you a comfortable bed for the night."

"No hard feelings," said the Duke. "Forget and forgive."

"That's an order, of course," said Poppy, winking at the General. "Forget and forgive."

"Forget!" cried Bunty, finding his voice. "I'll never forget my time here as long as I live! The world is going to know about it!"

"Now—come, come!" soothed the Duke.

"No, you come, sir," said Bunty. "This way. Come and look at this."

He started back to the end of the store where he had dug into

the wall about ten feet, opening a great space. He held up a hurricane lamp and his eyes shone. "Look—it *must* be! . . . Archaeologists have been looking for it for years. But always round the present site of Lamindon. But it's been here all the time, five miles away."

Under the lamplight they saw a spread of tessellated pavement, in its centre an intricate blue and green dolphin design surrounded by men and women in ancient clothes. The colours glowed richly under the soft lamplight.

"Roman mosaic," said Poppy. "How lovely!"

"It's the lost Roman city of Laminium!" cried Bunty. "Floor of a villa. There must be others, all hidden under these dunes. A great archaeological treasure. It could be bigger than Verulamium—"

"And you're going to drive a road through the lot," said the General sourly. "New road comes right across these dunes."

"New road!" Bunty almost shrieked. "Vandalism! There's going to be no new road across here! We can't destroy the country's antiquities. I'd be blackballed from the Athenæum, thrown out of every archaeological society in the country if I allowed it. I'll fight it tooth and nail."

"Absolutely," said the Duke. "Like driving a road through St. Paul's. No one would stand for it."

The General looked at Poppy, and she said quietly, "No road."

"No road," said the General, and he was thinking happily of the splendid stretches of Roman paving which would be brought into the sunlight. Here, in the heart of his sanctuary, people would be able to enjoy the beauties of a past civilisation and the pleasures of bird wild-life. There would be some disturbance while the old villas were being uncovered, but that would soon pass. He would keep an eye on things . . . A car park down on the Lamindon road and then a quiet walk along the bridlepath to ancient Laminium . . .

"Don't just stand there," said the Duke to the General, cutting in on his reverie. "Go and get a couple more spades. I want to see what the rest of the floor looks like."

"Yes, sir," said the General.

"And bring the rest of that Cockburn 1927 with you. Going to be thirsty work. Haggerty and I will be needing it."

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WELL-COUCHED

Two psychiatrists met, and one said to the other, "You're fine. How am I?"

Prometheus Unbound

MR. FORTESCUE was the manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank. He was also head of the External Branch of the Joint Services Standing Intelligence Committee. In his first capacity he welcomed Mr. Behrens into his office, one fine morning in May; in his second, he turned to business as soon as the heavy mahogany door had sighed itself shut.

"I'm worried," he said. "About Calder."

"I'm not too happy about him myself," said Mr. Behrens. "We're neighbours, as well as friends. And when a neighbour starts cutting you—"

"It's come to that, has it?"

"I used to go up to play backgammon with him, once a week at least. For the last three or four weeks he's been making excuses. I gathered the impression that what he really wanted was to be left alone."

"He leads a somewhat solitary life, doesn't he?"

"Entirely solitary. Apart from myself, the visiting tradespeople, and an occasional hiker, I doubt if he sees anyone from year's end to year's end."

"Do you think," said Mr. Fortescue, "that he might be going mad?"

There was regret in his voice, but no surprise. Professional agents usually did come to an untimely end. The curious, involute, secretive, occasionally dangerous, always responsible way of life took its sure toll of them. A few were destroyed by the enemy. More took their own lives; half a dozen, at least, as Mr. Fortescue knew, were living in quiet country houses where the furniture was fixed to the floors and the inmates ate with plastic knives and forks and were shaved by a resident barber.

"I should have thought," said Mr. Behrens, "that Calder was the very last man to go that way."

"It's the strongest," said Mr. Fortescue, "who break the most unexpectedly. If it wasn't for 'Prometheus' it wouldn't be so serious. I mean," he added, as he saw the look of pain in

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

A NEW MR. CALDER STORY

Mr. Behrens' eyes, "I should, of course, be desperately sorry if something like that did happen to Calder. He's deserved well of his country. And I know that he's a very old friend of yours."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Behrens. "How deeply involved is he?"

"He is one of three men—the other two are myself and Dick Harcourt—who know *all* the details. 'Prometheus' is an immense operation, and a great many people have to know a bit about it—you know a bit about it yourself—but we are the only three who know it all. We have been in it from the beginning. Indeed, I recollect that it was Calder who christened the operation."

"Has the name any particular significance?" asked Mr. Behrens.

"There was a little more sense in this than in most," said Mr. Fortescue. "Prometheus was born of a union between the Sea and a Mountain. When we first, seriously, turned our minds to the liberation and advancement of Albania—a people whose original name, as you no doubt know, means 'Sons of the Eagle'—'Prometheus Unbound' seemed quite an apt piece of nomenclature."

"Do I gather that these plans may be coming to a head?"

Mr. Fortescue placed the tips of his fingers together, and said, "Albania is in a state of balance. Not the balance of tranquillity, but the balance of strong, opposing forces. In one direction, they are drawn to Russia. The Albanian leader is an ardent Stalinist, even now that Stalinism has become unfashionable. In another direction, they have much in common with Yugoslavia. A union with Tito would please many. To the south they have strong, ancient, and sentimental ties with Greece."

"Pull devil, pull baker," said Mr. Behrens. "Who do we think will win?"

"We know who we'd *like* to win," said Mr. Fortescue. "Our money's on Greece. If Georgiades Mikalos could be sure of our help—sure that it would be effective—then it's pretty certain he'd have a shot at it. But our joint timing has got to be accurate—accurate to a hair's breadth. The stakes are too high for error. Mikalos will not forget what happened to Xoxe."

"Where is Mikalos now?"

"In the hills behind Argyrokastro. They probably have a fair idea where his hideout is, but can't do much about it. Mikalos is well protected by his own partisans, and has, besides, a convenient backdoor into Greece. But if he is inaccessible to Albania, he is inaccessible to us as well. And when the time comes we shall have to establish liaison with him. The idea was that Calder would go. He knows the country well—he was out

there with our mission in 1944. And he speaks the language."

"You say, the idea *was* that he should go. Do you now consider him too unreliable to send?"

"That is exactly what I want you to help me make my mind up about," said Mr. Fortescue.

Some three days later, Mr. Behrens trudged up the long, winding hill, overhung with trees, which led to the hilltop on which Mr. Calder's solitary cottage stood.

He found the golden hound, Rasselas, lying on the front step. He seemed unhappy.

"Where is he?" said Mr. Calder.

Rasselas thumped with his tail, and looked reproachfully over his shoulder, towards the interior of the house.

At this moment, Mr. Calder appeared in the hall. He was wearing what looked like a white nightgown. Combined with his bald and tonsured head, it gave him the appearance of a disreputable monk. He blinked and frowned into the sunlight; then seemed to recognise Mr. Behrens and said, "Come in. I'm very busy. But come in."

"If you're too busy to see me," said Mr. Behrens tartly, "I can always go back. After all, it's only two miles."

"No, no. Come in. You can probably help me."

He led the way into the sitting-room.

"What on earth are you up to now?" said Mr. Behrens.

Across one end of the room stretched an enormous piece of blank white paper, pasted on to a backing of plywood. Coming closer, Mr. Behrens saw that six large pieces of lining paper had been joined together. Coming closer still, he saw that the paper was not, as he had supposed, blank. Considerable areas of it were covered with Mr. Calder's neat, crabbed writing, interspersed with curious symbols and pictures.

"I have been engaged for some weeks—" said Mr. Calder, "I fear it may have made me sound unsociable—in one of the most curious and important tasks that I have ever undertaken in my life."

"I can't understand a word of it."

"Some of it is in a special shorthand which I use for the purpose. Otherwise I couldn't hope to get it all in."

"But what is it?"

"I am tracing the genealogy of Prometheus—back to Adam, and down to myself."

"Down to you?"

"Down to me," said Mr. Calder. He seemed to be entirely serious.

"But how," said Mr. Behrens mildly, "can you be sure that you *are* descended from Prometheus? You in particular, I mean. Of course, I know that if one goes back far enough, everyone is descended from everyone else, approximately."

"There is nothing approximate about this. I have felt for some time that there was royal blood in my veins. But sometimes, I have been aware that there is an altogether higher plane than royalty. The plane of divinity."

Mr. Behrens looked at his old friend, and there was grief in his eyes. "Have you really come to believe this bosh?" he said.

Mr. Calder was not put out.

"It is hard to grasp," he said, "but that is because you have not got the clue. Curiously enough, I was put on the track by Rasselas—"

The great dog, hearing his name, moved into the room and stood looking up at Mr. Calder. Mr. Calder patted his head absentmindedly.

"When you consider a dog's pedigree," he said, "you realise that it is essential to follow both the male *and* female lines. The mistake we make in human genealogy is concentrating on the male. Prometheus was no ordinary divinity. He was the inventor of architecture and astronomy, of writing and the use of figures, of prophecy, medicine, navigation, and metal-work. He inherited strength and intelligence from his father, imagination and curiosity from his mother. He bestowed on mankind the gifts of fire—from his father. And from his mother, the gift of hope."

"His mother's was the greater gift," said Mr. Behrens.

"I'm afraid you're right," said Behrens to Mr. Fortescue on the following afternoon. The meeting took place in one of the group of offices occupied by the Committee for European Co-ordination, in Richmond Terrace, under the shadow of the hideous new Air Ministry building. The third man present was Commander Richard Harcourt, small, compact, dark, and energetic, and recognisable the length of St. James's as a product of the Royal Navy.

All Mr. Behrens knew about him was that he had had a Greek mother, and had made a big reputation for himself in submarines in the Adriatic during the war; two reasons, no doubt, for his co-option on to this particular committee.

"The last time that I saw him myself," said Mr. Fortescue, "he spoke somewhat wildly on the subject of classical mythology."

"Do you think that he's gone broody?" said Commander Harcourt.

Mr. Behrens was familiar enough with the jargon of the Security Service to know what he meant.

"I didn't detect any ideological slant in his conversation," he said. "It was quite a generalised form of eccentricity."

"Basically, I'm sure he's still sound," said Mr. Fortescue.

"He may be sound," said the Commander, "but is he still a good security risk?"

The same thought was troubling them all. The store of secrets inside Mr. Calder's dome-shaped head was such that even a casual overspill would be priceless gleaning for the enemy.

"You'll have to keep as close an eye on him as you can," said Mr. Fortescue.

Mr. Behrens travelled sadly back to Lamperdown.

When Mr. Calder and he had retired from active service in M.I.6. they had been encouraged to set up house within a few miles of each other. They would thus be able, as Mr. Fortescue had put it, to give each other covering fire. It was a sensible precaution, which had already stood them in good stead more than once.

Mr. Behrens felt the defection of his ally very keenly. He was so silent at dinner that night that even his aunt, who was not given to small talk, noticed it. She supposed, since he had been up twice already this week to see his bank manager, that his troubles must be financial.

In the early hours of the following morning, Mr. Behrens got quietly out of bed, put on a pair of flannel trousers that were hanging ready behind the door and pulled a sweater over his head. As an afterthought he opened the drawer of his bedside table and extracted a gun, which he dropped into his trouser pocket.

As he stood in silence in the front hall, he heard again the noise that had summoned him from sleep. It was a scratching, gentle but persistent, as if someone was making repeated but unsuccessful attempts to strike a match.

He walked across and opened the front door. The great dog Rasselas was standing in the misty moonlight looking at him. He made no attempt to come in, but, when Mr. Behrens moved towards him, sighed and backed away.

"Understood," said Mr. Behrens. "I'll have to get some shoes and a coat. Wait there."

It took them half an hour to climb the hill to Mr. Calder's cottage. The door was closed but unlatched, and Mr. Behrens went through the place carefully. There was no sign of disturbance. There had been a wood fire in the grate and Mr. Behrens felt the ashes. There was still heat in them. He went up to Mr.

Calder's bedroom, and opened one or two of the drawers. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed. He returned to the sitting-room, and here he noticed something.

The framed genealogy of Prometheus had disappeared.

He was at Richmond Terrace by ten o'clock that morning, and since he had telephoned ahead, Mr. Fortescue and Commander Harcourt were there to meet him.

"I've shut the cottage up," said Mr. Behrens. "And told all the tradesmen that he's been called to the bedside of a sick cousin. His dog is with me for the time being. I thought I should have the devil of a job persuading him, but oddly enough Rasselas came quite quietly."

Mr. Fortescue nodded. It was the tradition of the Service. When a disaster occurred, you concentrated first on covering up. And this was black disaster.

"He'll have to be found," said Commander Harcourt. "Even if he's just had a brainstorm and wandered off somewhere, we can't leave him loose."

"No," said Mr. Fortescue. That was clear, too. "Is there any indication where he can have gone?"

"I had a word with the stationmaster at the junction. There's a very early train for London—it leaves about five in the morning. Takes the milk up and brings the newspapers back. There was a man on it who might easily have been Calder."

"I have a feeling that London is the place to start," said Mr. Fortescue. "I'll get the Department on to it. Keep in touch."

The summons came three days later, after breakfast. It was a glorious morning of high summer, and Mr. Behrens was contemplating a quiet day among his hives when the telephone rang.

"Tottenham Court Road Police Station," said Mr. Fortescue. "And bring the dog with you."

Mr. Behrens found three men in shirtsleeves in the Superintendent's baking oven of an office: the Superintendent himself, Detective Inspector Inskip, and Commander Harcourt. They were studying a large-scale street plan as Mr. Behrens came in. The heat, which had been so pleasant in the country, was in London a burden.

"One of our men spotted him in Charlotte Street yesterday evening," said the Commander. "He lost him but, as he seemed to be doing his shopping, it seems likely that he's lying up somewhere in the area. That's the idea we're working on, anyway."

The Superintendent nodded. The whole affair seemed to

him to be quite irregular. The man they were looking for had apparently committed no offence, and there was no warrant in existence for his apprehension. Nevertheless, his instructions, which he had received personally from the Assistant Commissioner in the early hours of that morning, were too specific to admit of argument or even discussion.

" I've got men blocking the roads out—" he demonstrated on the plan. " I gather you're going in to look for him. Inskip'll be with you. He knows the area well. It won't be easy to search."

" We're hoping the dog'll help us," said the Commander.

" Rather you than me," said the Superintendent. " Best get going."

Mr. Behrens recollected having visited Mr. Calder, some years before, when his old friend had been lying in a private ward of the Woolavington Wing of the Middlesex Hospital.

On these visits, Mr. Behrens had walked to the hospital from the Tottenham Court Road, through the maze of courts and alleys which lies to the north of Oxford Street. And he had noticed what a curious chunk of Central Europe had settled itself into this small area, a Quartier Latin whose existence was unsuspected by Londoners who kept to the main roads.

The larger shops were mostly tailors, furriers, and boot-makers, but there were smaller and more curious trades; wig-makers and button-moulders, gilders, glass-polishers, stage-shoemakers, key cutters, and bead stringers. There were shops which sold bath-chairs and perambulators, shops which sold harps, and shops which sold trusses; bakers, Kosher butchers, cut-price wine shops, delicatessen stores; and hundreds of cafés, tiny, flyblown places devoted to the fellow nationals of the proprietor; Greeks, Cypriots, Poles, Marseillaises, Danzigers.

The heatwave had brought the women out on to the rickety, first-storey balconies, where they sat in frowsy housecoats and dressing-gowns, surveying life as it passed up and down the baking street in front of their dispassionate eyes; men in cotton singlets and tight trousers, lounging in the cafés or basking in the sun; and swarms of children.

It was the children who attached themselves to Rasselas. A chattering, expectant covey of them followed him everywhere.

" What's the point of it? " growled Inspector Inskip. " Are they waiting for him to do tricks, or what? "

" Children have always loved Rasselas," said Mr. Behrens.

Where the other two were hot and cross, he was perversely cheerful. He found the gaudy streets with their dirty shop fronts and exciting smells stimulating.

"It seems to me," said Commander Harcourt, "that we're on a wild goose chase. The finest bloodhound in England couldn't smell out his owner in—this." He waved his hand at the street ahead.

They had been quartering the area systematically, taking each road in turn, walking down it on one side and up it on the other. Now they had reached the end of Surrey Street, and a choice of two narrow passages lay ahead of them.

"Oh, I think he'll tell us if Mr. Calder is anywhere about," said Mr. Behrens. "He doesn't do it by smell. He does it by instinct."

"He must have a hell of an instinct to work in these conditions," said the Inspector. "Will you leave him alone, you pestiferous little brat."

"Let's take the left-hand one first," said the Commander. "It looks a bit cleaner."

At the end of the passage, Rasselas paused for the first time of his own accord. He was staring up at the back of the building which lay between them and the parallel passage. Then he swung round, and padded off down the pavement. The men followed.

His objective was the other passage, and the house at the end of it. It was a lonely relic of the blitz, standing, like a surviving tooth in an ancient head, among the shored-up stumps of its fellows. The ground floor was a shop, but the window was so grimy that it was impossible to tell what merchandise it dealt in. The name above the door was Margolis.

Rasselas sank into his haunches outside the door, and stared upwards. It was a three-storey house. The windows were curtained and uncommunicative.

"If he was a game-dog," said the Commander, "I should say he was pointing. Do you know anything about the place?"

The Inspector said, "An old woman keeps it. A Greek, I think. She's never given us any trouble."

Rasselas' tail had begun to thump very gently against the pavement. The children had fallen silent. They looked hopeful. Whatever it was that they had come to see was clearly about to happen.

"If we all go in," said Mr. Behrens, "the lady'll have a fit. Why don't you go, Inspector?"

The Inspector nodded, pushed the door open, and disappeared into the gloomy interior. Five hot minutes trickled by. Mr. Behrens wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The crowd, he noticed, had grown.

The Inspector reappeared. He came up to the other two and

said, very quietly, " I think it's our man. He's got a room on the top storey. I got the old girl to go up and speak to him, but he's locked his door and he won't come out."

" He might come out for me," said Mr. Behrens. " He'll know my voice, anyway."

" Worth a try," said the Commander. " Where the hell's this crowd come from? " There were older people with the children now, dark faces, flashing teeth, bright eyes; all silent, and expectant.

" I think it's the combination of the dog and the Inspector," said Mr. Behrens. " I'd better go up and see if I can't settle it quietly. We don't want to start a riot."

Inside the shop, which was so dark that he was still unable to see exactly what it sold, he found a large lady dressed in black.

She gestured upwards. " Poor man. He is, I think, touched."

" I'm afraid he is," said Mr. Behrens. " We'll try to get him out with as little trouble as possible. Is this the way? "

There was a door at the back of the shop, leading to a flight of linoleum-covered stairs. Mr. Behrens trudged up. His heart was heavy. When he got to the top landing he saw that the door, directly opposite the head of the stairs, was ajar.

He called out, " Calder? It's me, Behrens. Are you in? "

From inside the room a voice which he barely recognised said, " Come no nearer, son of Jupiter. Prometheus stands at bay."

Mr. Behrens walked forward and opened the door. Mr. Calder, his chin fringed with a three-day beard, was sitting in his shirtsleeves on the edge of the bed. The framed genealogy of Prometheus filled the two walls behind him. But it was not this that caught and held Mr. Behrens' eye. For Mr. Calder had an automatic pistol in his hand. Before Mr. Behrens could say another word, he had raised it, and pointed it. As the gun went off with a deafening roar, Mr. Behrens went down. The bullet sang through the half-open doorway, exploded a pane of glass in the landing window, and whined out into the street.

The gun went off again.

Mr. Behrens, who had been crawling rapidly backwards, found himself halfway down the top flight of stairs, his chin on a level with the landing floor. He turned his head and saw Commander Harcourt and Inskip crouching below him.

Outside, the crowd was giving tongue.

" Damn and blast! " said the Commander. " This is just exactly what we didn't want to happen."

" What sort of gun? " said Inskip.

" A Colt automatic. Eight shots, if the clip's full."

"Six to come," said the Inspector gloomily. "Is he a good shot?"

"He's a marksman with any sort of weapon."

"He missed you."

"I don't think he meant to hit. It was a sort of warning salvo."

"It's going to be impossible to rush him," said the Inspector. "We might call out the fire brigade, put up a ladder, and lob a couple of tear-gas bombs through the window."

The Commander said acidly, "Our instructions were to take him with the minimum of fuss. Not the maximum."

"Can you suggest any other way?"

"Yes," said the Commander. "I can." They saw he had a gun in his hand. "From the top of the stairs, I think I could hit him in the leg, before he could hit me."

"Hitting him in the leg won't stop him," said Mr. Behrens. "You'd have to hit him in the head to do that."

"That might be a solution," said the Commander softly.

The two men were lying on the stairs, their faces a few inches from each other. Mr. Behrens said, "I couldn't agree to that."

"Kinder, really," said the Commander. "In the long run."

Mr. Behrens hesitated.

At that moment something hit them in the back; there was a flurry of movement, and Rasselas cleared their prostrate bodies, bounded along the short landing, and disappeared through the door. From inside came a crash.

"Come *on*," said Mr. Behrens.

They found Mr. Calder flat on his back, with Rasselas on top of him, trying to lick his face off.

The months that followed were the saddest that Mr. Behrens could remember. The newspapers splashed, and then forgot about, the Siege of Surrey Street. Mr. Calder had been removed to an institution near Godalming. His condition had become steadily worse, and no one had been allowed to visit him. "He wouldn't know you," the doctor in charge had said to Mr. Behrens, when he made his third application. "And you wouldn't enjoy it."

He had only seen Mr. Fortescue once. He gathered that Operation "Prometheus Unbound" was proceeding. Commander Harcourt was going in, in place of Mr. Calder. Mr. Behrens was too well trained to ask any further questions.

Eventually his low spirits attracted the attention of his aunt, who suggested that he took a holiday. She said that she had heard that the west coast of Italy was very pleasant in the autumn.

"How can I possibly go?" said Mr. Behrens. "I can't leave Rasselas. And he'd be too much for you."

"Put him in a kennel."

"A kennel, indeed. What an idea."

"Other people put their dogs in kennels when they go abroad."

"Rasselas isn't an ordinary dog."

Every time his name was mentioned, the great golden creature looked at the speakers. During all that time, he had shown no signs of restlessness. He had merely been passive. It was as if he was waiting on some event, and content to wait patiently.

"If you won't go," said his aunt, "I will. You're no pleasure to live with at the moment." And she packed her bags the very next morning and departed for Rapallo . . .

Late on the following afternoon, Mr. Behrens was sitting in his study, contemplating an empty future, when the bell rang. There was a device in the front door through which Mr. Behrens could view his visitors before admitting them. Peering through it, he was astounded to find himself looking into the sagacious face of Mr. Fortescue.

In all the years he had known him, he had never visualised Mr. Fortescue as leaving the square mile of streets between Victoria Station and the Admiralty Arch. It was as great a shock as if, making his way through one of the leafy lanes near the house, he had come face to face with a London omnibus.

He hastened to open the door.

When they were comfortably seated, and a drink had been offered and refused, Mr. Fortescue said, "I had business at Dover this morning, and when I saw that my return journey brought me almost through Lamperdown, I thought I would look you up. I had one or two things to tell you, which could not very easily have been said on the telephone."

Low though they were, Mr. Behrens' spirits sank still lower.

He said, "It was very good of you to take the trouble."

"I know that you have been interested in our—" Mr. Fortescue permitted himself a very slight smile—"in our Promethean operation. Calder was, of course, to have been our emissary to Mikalos. When he—when it became clear that he could not undertake the assignment—we had to find a substitute. The only other available candidate was Commander Harcourt."

Mr. Behrens found himself thinking of the last occasion on which he had met the Commander. He had clearly intended, if no other solution had presented itself, to kill Mr. Calder; and, thinking matters over afterwards, Mr. Behrens could not find it in his heart to criticise the decision.

It is true that the Commander had not been thinking of Calder as a man. He had been thinking about him as an abstract problem in security. But on any grounds, would he not have been better dead than in a padded cell?

Mr. Behrens became aware that some comment was expected of him, and said, "Yes. I imagine Commander Harcourt will do the job excellently. He was obviously the man for the job."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Fortescue, "it was obvious to the other side, as well."

Mr. Behrens looked up sharply.

"Has something happened?" he said.

"They must have reasoned that we would send Harcourt. We have so few people who know the area and can speak the language. They were obviously on the lookout for him, and picked him up soon after he landed. Unfortunately, before he could talk to Mikalos."

"Is he dead?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. Fortescue. "His body was found. His throat had been cut. It was put down as the work of brigands. He was travelling as a Greek businessman. No one has officially connected him with us. And we shall deny all knowledge of him."

"Of course," said Mr. Behrens. "You'll have to find someone else to do the job now, I suppose."

"We have a substitute."

"And will they be waiting for him, too?" Mr. Behrens found it difficult to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"I don't think," said Mr. Fortescue, "that it would have occurred to them that this particular man would be going. We have arranged quite a good cover for him."

Outside, the autumn afternoon was turning into evening. A party of boys were kicking a soccer ball on the green, being careful to keep off the mown cricket square. A little red post-van flashed past in a cloud of dust. Mr. Behrens sighed. Six months ago, it had seemed to him that the Old Rectory, and the village of Lamperdown, and the County of Kent contained all that he needed to keep him happy for the rest of his life. Now, something had happened. A subtle piece of scene-changing had been worked, a different backdrop, a couple of flats whisked away, a switch in the lighting-plot, and Arcady had become a prison cell.

Rasselas seemed to be feeling it, too. Ever since Mr. Fortescue had arrived, he had been restless. Now Rasselas was lying in a corner of the room, regarding him open-mouthed, as if he was the embodiment of the successive disasters which had befallen them.

"In all the time I've worked for you," said Mr. Behrens, "I've never yet asked you a favour."

"True," said Mr. Fortescue.

"I'm going to ask one now. I want to take over this mission. I've a working knowledge of Greek and Italian. Not enough to pass as a native, but quite enough to get over to Mikalos anything you want to get over to him."

"I'm afraid—" said Mr. Fortescue.

"Before you turn it down, bear in mind that if you say no, you're probably going to have a couple of mental cases on your hands. If I have to sit here much longer doing nothing, I shall go mad."

"I can certainly find you a job—"

"I want this particular job."

"It's impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"It's impossible," said Mr. Fortescue, "because it no longer exists. It's been done."

Mr. Behrens stared at him. Rasselas was on his feet, hackles back, amber eyes gleaming.

"What do you mean? Quiet, Rasselas. Lie down. I thought you said that you had just found a possible substitute."

"I said that we had a substitute. We had him ready at the same time as Commander Harcourt. It's better to double up on these important jobs. The substitute actually left England the day before Harcourt. I picked up his report at Dover this morning. It crossed a few hours ahead of him. But he'll be in England now." Mr. Fortescue looked at his watch. "Indeed, he'll be on his way to London. I don't know a lot about dogs, but it seems to me that if you don't open either the door or the window, he'll attempt to break out of his own accord."

"Rasselas!" said Mr. Behrens in his sternest voice, but the dog took not the slightest notice. He turned on Mr. Fortescue, as if he was appealing to someone with more sense.

Mr. Fortescue raised the latch of the window and swung it open, and Rasselas went through it in one straight, golden arc, raced down the front drive like a driven dust-storm, and threw himself at the stocky figure standing in the gateway.

"It would appear," said Mr. Fortescue, "that our substitute has got here a little quicker than I thought he would. I hope the dog doesn't kill him in his enthusiasm. A written report is one thing. A verbal report will be even more enlightening."

It was some hours later, and Mr. Fortescue had departed for London, before Mr. Behrens got round to saying, "But why—?"

Mr. Calder, looking a little thinner, but remarkably brown and fit, leaned back in his chair, scratched the dome of Rasselas' head, and said, "It was very difficult, very difficult indeed. We found out—but a lot too late—that Harcourt had sold out."

"Commander Harcourt?" Mr. Behrens thought of the dark, clever, determined face. It seemed impossible, though not so impossible as some of the things that had happened in the past twenty years. As he thought about it, a lot of facts fell into place.

"They got at him through his Greek relations. He's been theirs since the war. God knows what damage he did before we got wise to him."

"He'd been in 'Prometheus' almost from the start."

"From the start. He knew it all. We'd only got two options. Drop the whole thing, or try a sort of treble bluff. If I was groomed for the job, you see, and then went off my head, Harcourt was the obvious substitute. Of course, he had to say yes. Meaning to make touch with his own friends as soon as he got ashore in Albania. But Mikalos has got plenty of friends, too. They got him first.

"Meanwhile, I'd landed fifty miles down the coast. I suppose I was about the last person the opposition would have expected to see, so I had quite an easy run. And a very interesting talk with Mikalos. Prometheus is more than a little tired of having his liver pecked out by the eagle. We may be seeing some action in that part of the world quite soon."

"I wish you'd told me," said Mr. Behrens.

"I wanted to. Fortescue wouldn't hear of it. And I'm afraid he was right."

"What do you mean?"

"Think back to that time in Surrey Street. If Rasselas hadn't intervened, Harcourt was going to take a shot at me, wasn't he? If you had known what you know now, would you have behaved exactly as you did?"

"I suppose that's right," said Mr. Behrens. "So you and Fortescue were the only people in the know."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Calder. "Rasselas knew *all* about it."

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Q.E.D.

If YOU are thinking of spending a few glad pennies on a bikini this year, take a long honest look in the glass first . . . and ask yourself—are you a bikini girl? . . .

You aren't sure? Then don't buy a bikini!

from Woman, May 21, 1960

Thief on the Champs Elysées

BY

HALLIE BURNETT

STANDING before the kiosk waiting for a copy of *l'Express*, I suddenly felt my big leather handbag weightless as an empty pillowcase, and I did not have to look inside to know I had been robbed by the girl in the Paris store.

My first impulse was to cry out to the gendarme standing like a giant gull flapping his cape wings at the turbulent six o'clock traffic from his island on the Champs Elysées. But by the time I had taken a step forward he had blown his whistle at a stalled motorist and had begun to shout such invective that, naturally, I reconsidered. A man too deep in any role does not care to be interrupted; it was doubtful, anyway, if he would consider a petty crime in a French five-and-dime store to be of any great importance.

There was a second, younger gendarme watching like an understudy from a window of a stationary police car but, seeing his concentration, I knew that to neither of them could I give way to hysteria. So I turned back to the kiosk, handed over the one franc for my newspaper (leaving only four new francs in my purse), then spent another twenty-five centimes for *Le Figaro.* But my poise vanished at the moment this last coin left my hand and I raced back to the corner entrance of the store.

The doorway now was blocked by two dogs and a crowd of shoppers hilariously observing the somewhat distracted attempts of a large proletarian mongrel and a small aristocratic white poodle to mate. It was only when the mongrel was dragged away by the nervous lad who was his master that the mistress of the elegant poodle managed to restrain her little bitch; but still the public remained to laugh and discuss l'affaire with the poodle's mistress, a cunningly designed bitch herself, in white wool and pink make-up.

"Naughty, naughty," she cried, and wagged her own white

derrière in unison with her pet's as though she herself had felt the challenge of the attack.

"Excuse, please. Excusez-moi!" I pleaded, pushing against the crowd. Resentfully they let me through, their faces plainly saying, Here is another American tourist possessed of not a shred of feeling for the most amusing facts of life.

As it was only by pushing and struggling that I got through to the counter where, the moment before, I had been trying on a cheap, ridiculous hat, I refused to be intimidated by the crowd. Yet the vendeuse, once I had attracted her attention, stared as though she had never seen me, and for a moment this took all courage from me.

"Didn't you see the German girl?" I cried, breaking in on another customer. "The one beside me a moment ago? When I tried on these hats? Did you see her leave? Do you know which way she went?" I speak an American French, it is true, but surely she understood.

Handing a straw cloche to the customer, she retorted, "Je ne comprends pas!" I am ordinarily a coward before antagonism and I trembled, but did not retreat.

"I no understan'," the German girl had said to me in English —but that was after she had asked, "You do not find a hat you like?" with so little accent that I thought she was a fellow American presuming on our nationality; also I had not cared for the way she was crowding up against me. Then I turned and saw the foreign look. Although her soiled blonde hair was cut in the same style as mine, it was clinging moistly to a broad square forehead; and, while the skin was young, it was marred by imperfections, as though she did not eat regularly or well. Yet there was also a familiarity about the face which puzzled me. Had I perhaps seen her at the Ecole Française—she had seemed to know me by sight—or did she resemble some person I had known in the past?

I recalled that a travelling American must be friendly with all strangers, so I managed a distant but polite smile, at the same time drawing away from the touch of the girl's heavy coat against my bare arm. After all, it was a warm day in early September.

"The head sizes are too small for me," I replied, an admission which sometimes sounds boastful but always makes me think a cow's head is larger than a monkey's.

The girl disappeared, but to my surprise she reappeared at my right side. And she looked at me coldly then as though she'd not been the one to speak first and could not now imagine why I spoke to her at all!

"I no understan'," she said, with such a marked, guttural accent I wondered if I had been mistaken, if it had been someone else who had spoken before. And then the next instant, like a whitecapped wave dissolved by the swell of the sea, the girl vanished into the crowd, having by then extracted my passport folder from the handbag over my left arm . . .

"I've been robbed," I tried to say calmly to the saleswoman. I leaned across the counter to bring my words closer and clearer to her, for I could not allow her to ignore me. "The girl who stood here a moment ago—You saw her! You spoke to her and to me."

The vendeuse shrugged and coolly turned to rearrange her hats on the shelves as though the subject were closed—as though the girl I had spoken of, so far as she remembered this day or any other, had never existed.

Nervous tears rose in my eyes and, turning quickly, I knocked my frail paper bag, filled with objects I'd bought, against the counter, where it broke. (So many things which should be strong in France are frail, like paper bags, and things thought to be weak are granite, like this woman.) My small gifts for friends scattered like hailstones: the cans of goose liver and pork pâté, the glass beads, pink soap, scarves, and perfume bottles with flower-trimmed necks, rolled, cluttered, fluttered or crashed into the aisle, and one passing Frenchwoman was hit on the foot by a perfume vial in the shape of a pig. I stooped to retrieve the nearest articles, thrusting these into my empty handbag (where my passport folder had been the hour before), then retreated into the crowd to lean against a counter where the red, blue, green, and yellow hats whirled into a spectrum of indistinguishable colours before my eyes.

I had not gone back to my French class on the Left Bank that afternoon after the fitting of my Chantilly lace dress at Mlle Boucicault's on the boulevard Haussmann because I felt too elevated by my glorified appearance in the dark mirror to settle down to another daily battle of French verbs in company with other accents as bad as my own. There, in the dim room where the little seamstress strained her eyes, I had seen myself as I could be: my square brow almost distinguished-looking, my dark-blonde hair Rapunzelian, and my full face luminous as a photograph of the Princess d'X in the last issue of *Réalités*; so I rebelled. However, like many rebels, I had no cause, so the best thing I could think of was to go to a movie on the Champs Elysées.

Then, since the black lace gown was costing me twenty dollars more than I'd put aside for it, I passed up a film I wanted to see

for a grade B picture made for French consumption only (there being a difference of four new francs between the two), and the dialogue in this was incomprehensible, the plot confused, and the setting regional. I had walked out before the end with still an hour of freedom before I was expected back at the Pension for the evening meal, when I noticed the store doors were open and I decided this was an unexpected opportunity to purchase small gifts to take back home.

My loose change was quickly gone, and it was necessary to take out the passport folder where I kept large bills—with my American Express cheques, my SAS plane ticket, vaccination certificate, and other personal papers. Unfortunately, in order to remove one ten-franc note, I had to expose all, including the green end of my American passport; and while this had never bothered me before that moment, I felt a curious sense of impending danger.

I could not reasonably explain this, nor can I now, yet it was as though some magnetic force were drawing that folder from my hands; and the sensation was so physical and so intense that after I had replaced the folder my arm actually ached. I recall rubbing my shoulder in alarm as though the strain had drawn heavily on the muscles of my heart, and then, as now, it seemed that I might faint . . .

Now again, a weakness came over me, and I fell into that pit of clairvoyance where the sense of danger is as staggering as a drop from a precipice in a dream. So I understood quite clearly that by the time I'd put my folder out of sight it had already, in effect, been stolen by a thief in the store.

The weakness passed and anger returned as I opened my eyes on the increasing disorder of the milling French crowd with the dinner hour beginning to stir their bellies and their temper. My impulse was now to get away, let it go, make out the best I could; but I thought if only someone would help me, I might still be able to find the German girl and force her to return my passport folder. After all, I was in a bad way without it.

"Where does one find the manager?" I asked another saleswoman politely, but since she was concluding a sale and I had made her lose count of the change, she too stared in resentment. Then someone directed me to a long white basement passageway in the rear, and, turning my back upon the crowd, I entered upon a stretch of white walls and utter, unexpected silence in a passageway that must have tunnelled far back under a city block.

Here was no visible exit other than the way I had come—the three doors I passed, running down the corridor, seemed closed and locked for ever—but at the far end where I made a turn to

the left I found a heavy door bolted like a vault. There was a smell of dryness now as from a well-stoked furnace, and it seemed to me this might have been a gas chamber in the days of the Nazi Occupation; certainly I had been misdirected, so I turned and ran quickly back down the white hall until, seeing one of the three doors open, I paused and looked inside to meet the eyes of a man standing over a white porcelain urinal. For one awful instant we both stared, unable to break the lock of mutual horror, then I fled through the door and out into the street.

The gendarme in the police car now was facing the other way, dreaming over orange umbrellas spread open like exotic fruits above the green tables of a café, but as I ran towards him his eyes turned and examined me with mild interest.

"A thief! Une voleuse!" I cried, before I again lost my nerve. "Monsieur, s'il vous plaît—I have been robbed in that store!"

He jumped out of his car at once, spoke rapidly to the officer on the safety island, and then entered the store with me. There he asked questions to right and to left so imperiously that in spite of the same blank stares as before, I was charmed and encouraged by his authority. And the hat saleswoman, this time, was not so indifferent, even though she still denied having seen anyone beside me at the counter in the past hour. There had been only one étrangère, she insisted, since noon: this one (who was I).

Like searching for a pebble on a rocky shore when the tide has come and gone, we wandered from counter to counter until the female manager appeared from the depths to pronounce any theft here impossible. If Mam'selle would only produce the proof, she said, or perhaps if I looked again in my bag, I would find the object which I thought I had lost.

"I did not lose anything," I said firmly. "My passport folder with my identification, my money, everything I own, was stolen in this store. I only wish help in finding the German girl who stood beside me." I pointed out the saleswoman. "It seems very strange that she will not admit this."

The manager continued to shake her head as other customers gathered round, and some were friendly to me, a stranger in trouble, and some were not, seeing I was American. But the young gendarme stood steady and unflinching as a rock, coming back again and again with his sharp, hard questions; then we were on the street, the store closing for the night, and nothing had been accomplished.

I waited beside my defender as he consulted a new small

book. "Le Commissariat. Ah," he murmured, his finger moving down the pages. Then all at once I understood he must be very new in the service, or he would not be so eager to help, and so uninformed. His uniform too was fresh, new, unwrinkled, his shoes and belt highly polished (doubtless even his gun was still untried!). Then, as I watched, his hard round chin puckered, his Norman blue eyes brightened, and even his tan moustache lifted with a charming smile.

Moistening his red lips, he showed me what he had been looking for in the book. "We go there!" he said, and we set off together on the rue Balzac where he made a sharp left into the rue Lord Byron, and then a sharp right, like an excited schoolboy in search of a darting squirrel. Tonight he would no doubt return to his parents—I decided he was too young and thoughtless for wife and child—who would listen to his prattle about an American woman who had carried in her handbag as much money as a Frenchman spends in a year for his wine; and then I caught the eye of a passer-by and understood that I myself could seem to be a criminal, dragged along by the police! Once again I had the impulse to bolt, but by then it was too late. Unexpectedly my gendarme asked, with some concern, "Ça va bien?" And my face must surely have been a mess, red and soiled, with my hair hanging limp as the German thief's across her forehead.

"Ça va," I returned crossly, but then he moved to the outer edge of the pavement and motioned me on ahead, apparently deciding at last that it was safe to be more agreeable. After that we walked along as equals, talking of this thing that had happened to me, he even understanding my French, and I—since he spoke with peasant slowness—understanding his. The accidental meeting of our eyes was so agreeable that by the time we reached the Commissariat on the Faubourg-du-Roule in the 8th Arrondissement we were remarkably at ease with one another, so that my protector introduced me to the elder of the two officers as tenderly as though we had been in love.

A small Algerian standing before the court tapped lightly and respectfully on the counter. "Je vous prie, Monsieur le Commissaire. We stand here first. Hear me, please," he requested, and his sullen woman twisted a finger through a black curl, narrowing her eyes at me. But the officials were more interested in my case and spoke in such a way that the poor couple moved back to a bench against the wall with the resignation of those who must always wait on official favour.

Now, with gallantry, my gendarme began our story, and I was pleased that he told it so well, encouraged by his superiors who

listened like elders sponsoring a young man and are delighted at his making good. The second official, however, had to leave for his dinner and rose, shaking hands with his colleague, nodding approvingly and encouragingly at the gendarme, and at the door his eyes lingered a moment upon my legs and this also seemed friendly and human. Then we got down to the business of the theft.

The Commissaire stated his passionate regret that I, an American guest of Paris, had been treated so badly. That I, a lovely lady, must understand that Paris was really not a lawless city—not like New York, which our own Mayor, interviewed last week by *France Soir*, had admitted to be shockingly full of unsolved crimes.

At this moment a small and humble detective came in on my case, with a dog nervy and tail-wagging as any stray along a country road, and although one could hardly take either of them seriously, the dog's tongue dripped with anticipation, his eyes glistened, and he pulled on the leash as though eager to get on with the chase. I could not understand why they returned back through the door through which they had come—which could not possibly lead to the store—since I had been requested to give the dog a friendly sniff of my hand which held the bag.

I did not wish, however, to criticise Monsieur le Commissaire, who was certainly doing his best. Even now he was writing out a report for the American Embassy, a favour I had not thought of asking.

"They will be très, très agité," he said. "A passport is taken seriously by your Government, madame. And by ours," he added hastily.

Then he asked if I had enough francs for my dinner, putting his hand in his pocket, and I was touched by this, but explained that I was perhaps still expected at my Pension, late as it was. At that he himself telephoned Mlle du Cœur, conversing with her in the polished manner she prefers, and when he bowed me away at last it seemed as though we had met in social surroundings and only incidentally were in these drab police headquarters which, now that I thought about it, had the smell of frightful but detected crimes.

At the last moment my eyes met those of my gendarme—whose name I never knew!—seeing his expression so regretful, his red lips so moist, and his eyes so soft and brooding that it seemed something profoundly emotional had been shared between us in this most exceptional hour of our intimacy. He even took a step towards me, impulsively, as a lover, wishing to keep me from leaving—but it was too fragile a thing between us, and the

older man, sympathetically but firmly, reached out and put a restraining hand upon his arm.

As I passed the Algerian couple stirring hopefully on their bench, I felt quite misty-eyed, and it was not until I found myself again on the darkening street, the lamps now lighted, that I remembered the thief herself had not, after my first description, been referred to by anyone again.

Back at the Pension I was greeted with excitement, and there was a small supper which Mlle du Cœur had placed in my room, ham and cheese and an orange from Spain, with my own bottle of cold white wine, a clean napkin wrapped about its neck. So when I went to bed at last I felt comforted as a child after a storm of tears. It was not until much later, in my dreams, I found the German girl beside me once more, somehow increasingly familiar, the same height as myself, although she had seemed less tall the hours before. And my sense of wellbeing vanished, so that I wept, awakening with a sense of loss more personal and disturbing than any I had ever known . . .

Lightheartedness briefly returned next day when the airline gave me another ticket, and a Frenchman at the American Express office issued new travellers cheques to me equal in value to those stolen with my passport.

"We may ask you later to identify any forgeries," he said, and I begged to be allowed to do this, to do anything to show my gratitude. I also suggested that the cheques be particularly watched for in Germany, since the thief had spoken with a German accent.

"Would you give me a brief description?" he asked, although I thought I had done this.

"She was about my height," I said, "and also my colouring. It is even possible that if we dressed alike she might somehow resemble me." This I said on the impulse of the moment, for it had not occurred to me before. I could not understand why the young man seemed startled at what I said.

Then at the American Consulate I discovered the precarious balance of my situation, for I failed to be received with any friendliness at all.

"A lost passport," said the narrow-chinned, pale-lipped woman official, "places the guilt squarely upon the loser, Mrs. Greenhill."

"But I did not lose it! Here is the report of the Commissioner of Police," I said, thrusting the document across her desk. "This is the proof if there is any doubt in your mind."

But the woman only looked at me with further dislike and

touched the tip of a pointed tongue to her upper lip, shaking her head. "This only says that you reported your passport stolen; I fail to see any *proof*. I can only repeat, an American passport is not a thing to be treated lightly."

"I went to the police—and they believed me!" But I saw then I was being accused of something.

"Those Frenchmen can be fooled," she said briefly. "We cannot."

"I have my reservation to go home on Friday," I said, fighting for control. "I must have a passport—I cannot possibly stay in Paris any longer!"

"We are not a Welfare Agency," said the woman coldly.

"Everyone has been helpful," I protested. "Even the Commissioner of Police offered to lend me francs for my dinner." Yet when I saw the nasty look on her face I knew I had been foolish to say this.

"I doubt that an officer of the French Government would lend money to any woman—except at a price!" she said dryly, and I saw we were fighting the most primitive battle of all, the generosity of men towards one kind of woman and not to another.

"If I don't have my passport by Friday, I will lose my reservation and—perhaps more," I said quietly. I could not tell her I was going home to be remarried to a man I had divorced, and that I could not now bear to wait another hour. She would have no more sympathy for that kind of nonsense than for any other. "Please—surely there is something you can do."

So, finally, perhaps trapped by my false humility, the woman stared with resentful eyes and told me to return on Wednesday. "With photos, and accompanied by someone to identify you. In the meantime—try to find your passport."

On Wednesday I went back with three photos and an acquaintance from the Pension who carried driver's licence, insurance papers, personal mail, and an American library card: but, alas, she had forgotten to bring her own passport, which was in her husband's coat pocket. The assistant consul became quite cheery when she discovered this and sent me away again empty-handed, saying to come back on Thursday.

But Thursday turned out to be a holiday, which I had not foreseen, nor, perhaps, had she. So the acquaintance and I, who had hurried through breakfast in order to appear at nine-thirty, were turned away again. There had been rain in the night, and when we saw it still looked threatening, the lady from the Pension decided to go right back to her room. I found a small café a block from the Consulate and sat there over coffee, brooding. Who and what I was, if I had been asked to prove

my existence at that moment, I did not know, for it seemed one could not exist without papers and the official approval of the baleful, cold-natured assistant lady consular employee. But the thief, I thought suddenly, the German girl, how easy it must be now for her! All she has to say is: Here is *my* passport, *my* money, *my* cheques, and she will be honoured, while I, who can be identified only by my face, my bones, and my speech, am unaccepted, accused of not telling the truth.

But the thought of that girl intrigued me. Perhaps she has a lover, I thought, a Frenchman; and since Friday at six p.m. they must have spent many of those crisp, decorative, new ten-franc notes. The girl also, surely, will have bought a new, lighter coat and had her blonde hair washed. And if her lover *is* a Frenchman they will also have eaten good food and drunk fine wines, which even so soon as this may have improved the texture of her skin.

Yet I barely had money for this extra coffee, and the lace dress would have to be cancelled, that pale, transfigured face rising from the mirror of Mlle Boucicault forgotten as though it had never been.

Feeling intense self-pity, seeing again that mirror which now reflected no image of myself at all, I was relieved when an American Army man I'd met the week before came by and sat down beside me. Listening to my unhappy story he, being a man of action, at once took charge. Even though it was a holiday, he got up from the table and telephoned a friend in the Embassy and stormed about my treatment, saying if something was not done toute suite, he'd raise holy hell!

Thus the next morning I was received quickly by the assistant lady consul, and although she found one last way of annoying me—my pictures were not acceptable and I must go to a photographer down the street who charged three times the ordinary fee—I stood before her at last, complete with all requirements. She looked at my witness's documents, she looked at the forms I had filled in, and she looked at my newest photo.

"This doesn't look like you," she complained, but now only as someone forced to accept irritating reality. And certainly the photo did not: with that harassed look on my face and my neglected blonde hair, I resembled more the German thief than I did myself!

Yet I managed to keep my tongue, even when she gave me a passport good for only six days, although I was laughing hysterically when I went, for the last time, out of the Consulate door.

Back in New York at last, I remained grateful to the French

gendarme and the Commissaire, to Mlle du Cœur, the Frenchman at the American Express, and to the Major of the American Army. I told the story several times about the unkindness of the American consul's assistant, and friends said I should write to my congressman or to the newspapers, which I never did. I was remarried and happy, and was glad to put the whole thing from my mind. Until one morning four months later, when a letter came from a Mr. Brown at the Express Company asking me to call and identify signatures on cheques I had reported lost in Paris.

Feeling oddly relieved that here at last was proof that I had been robbed, I telephoned and said I would be delighted to come down, although I hadn't really thought the cheques would ever be returned.

"Why not?" Mr. Brown asked. I did not know, I said, although I supposed it was because of the German girl.

"Were you in Germany then, Mrs. Greenhill? I understood you were only in France."

This seemed irrelevant, but I explained it was a German girl who had stolen them from my handbag in the Paris store.

"I did not know that," he said. Somewhat hastily, I said I would be right down.

I was delayed by various duties, so that it was three hours before I ascended the old-fashioned elevator and entered a room which seemed the sum total of all official rooms in the world. I'd been in quite a number since I'd started this search for my possessions, the police station in the Faubourg-du-Roule, the Express office in Paris, the Consulate—all cheerless, repelling blocks of granite challenge to unproven claims of humanity.

"I'm expected," I said to the girl at the switchboard, and a young man stood halfway down that big room and motioned to me. His face was reassuringly young, although blank and smooth, and expressionless eyes gave me a searching look of inspection before we sat down. Then he opened a folder on his desk and placed it on my lap.

"There are the cheques, Mrs. Greenhill," he said. "Please examine them carefully. Tell me, if you can, which signatures are real and which are fraudulent."

"Zurich!" I exclaimed. "They speak German there—at least I was not wrong about the girl's accent."

"All our cheques are cleared through Zurich," he informed me, as though I had said something stupid. "Now, the signatures—please."

There was my name at the top of each cheque as I had signed it in my own bank and there was the counter-signature in the

lower right-hand corner, also in my handwriting—small, too rapid for style, and too slanting, I have been told, for emotional stability. And all of these signatures, there was no doubt about it, must be mine.

"They look all right," I said, thinking this was some trick to show me only my own signed cheques; then I counted them, and saw there were far too many here for that.

"Please look again, Mrs. Greenhill. This is a very serious matter."

I picked up the cheques one by one, examining each letter, becoming so absorbed that I did not at once notice a woman who joined us. But when I looked up to say that it was still absurdly difficult to swear I had not written them all, she was looking over his shoulder with the same bright, observant, accusing smile I'd last seen on the face of the woman assistant consul in Paris.

It was important that they understand, so I began to tell them all the circumstances of the theft. This thief on the Champs Elysées who had been so clever as to master my signature was a dull-looking creature as she stood beside me in the Paris store, I said. So how could they explain this thing the German girl had done—mastering an imitation of my handwriting which had been shaped by my own three hundred years of American environment? Were there no national differences any more? I went distractedly on, about the girl and me at opposite poles, and how she had stood there trying on a hat and watching me—but the vendeuse had claimed she remembered only one of us.

"Mrs. Greenhill, will you please, once more, describe this girl."

"Yes, of course." But suddenly I faltered, my face grew hot, and I found myself snapping the catch on my small city handbag. And although I needed a cigarette, I dared not reach for one, knowing that my hand would tremble. For the truth was now that I could not remember the face of the girl nor evoke her in my mind. Even as I tried to say the words I thought I had said before—blonde, my height, a wide square forehead, round flushed face, brown eyes—it seemed I was describing not a stranger, but myself!

Then again it was as it had been in the store, when I was fighting for possession against a will strong enough to draw my life's blood, challenging my own right to keep what was privately and exclusively my own. Now again, it seemed I was protecting something perhaps less tangible but of even greater value: my own belief in myself. "The man at the Express office in Paris believed me, you know," I said wretchedly, seeing plainly

enough what they all were thinking. "*He* did not once suggest I might have lost it—"

"Nor have we," said Mr. Brown, exchanging glances with the woman. "Even though there have been no other thefts reported in that district for a year."

"A year ago," said the woman, "a Frenchwoman with a red purse did a job in that store. Yet it is hard to see how a German girl could have escaped without attracting more attention."

There is no German girl, they seemed to say, where is your proof? Here are the cheques you reported lost and the others the foolish Frenchman in our office gave you—but the signatures, you see, are all the same.

Then unexpectedly Mr. Brown leaned forward and touched one finger to the smaller pile of cheques. "Those are the forgeries, Mrs. Greenhill. You will observe the movement of the pen on the final letters, and how the 'r' is not the same. So there is nothing more we need ask of you at this moment—although since two are still missing we may call on you again. Thank you for coming in."

The trial was ended, and they meant me to go. But this was not fair; I could see even then that they had not taken my word for all this, and I wanted to prove it to them, and to the gendarme and the Commissaire who had looked so sad to have me leave—for they had not believed me, either: I understood that at last. I was the only one who had seen the German girl, who could not now be properly described, yet she was still abroad in the world, still uncommitted and still free—my deadliest enemy, who had stolen my money, my passport, and my face.

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SEAWARDS

Over the dim blue rim of the sea
Comes the pale gold disc of the moon;
The topsails slat as we pass the quay,
And the yard goes up with a tune.

We are outward bound for the west tonight,
And the yard goes up with a cheer;
And the bells will ring in the town tonight,
And the men in the inns will hear.

And the carts will creak in the lanes tonight,
And the girls will dance to the band;
But we shall be out with the sails to fist,
And the topsail-sheets to hand.

ANON

Barber's Poll

I must to the barber's, mounsieur, for methinks I am marvellous hairy

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

I hope I'll not be hairless
There's nothing I could bear less.
Disease of the follicle
Is diabollicle!

I. KENVYN EVANS

Shaving Graces

During the process of the shave, it is customary for the barber to apply the particular kind of mental torture known as the third degree. This is done by terrorizing the patient as to the very evident and proximate loss of all his hair and whiskers, which the barber is enabled by his experience to foretell. "Your hair," he says, very sadly and sympathetically, "is all falling out. Better let me give you a shampoo?" "No." "Let me singe your hair to close up the follicles?" "No." "Let me plug up the ends of your hair with sealing-wax, it's the only thing that will save it for you?" "No." "Let me rub an egg on your scalp?" "No." "Let me squirt a lemon on your eyebrows?" "No" . . .

This process is continued until one of two things happens. Either the customer is obdurate, and staggers to his feet at last and gropes his way out of the shop with the knowledge that he is a wrinkled, prematurely senile man, whose wicked life is stamped upon his face, and whose unstopped hair-ends and failing follicles menace him with the certainty of complete baldness within twenty-four hours—or else, as in nearly all instances, he succumbs.

In the latter case, immediately on his saying "yes" there is a shout of exultation from the barber, a roar of steaming water,

and within a moment two barbers have grabbed him by the feet and thrown him under the tap, and in spite of his struggles are giving him the Hydro-magnetic treatment.

STEPHEN LEACOCK, *Men Who Have Shaved Me*

Gold locks, and black locks,
Red locks and brown,
Topknot to love-curl,
The hair wisps down:
Straight above the clear eyes
Rounded round the ears,
Snip-snap and snick-a-snack
Clash the Barber's shears;
Us, in the looking-glass,
Footsteps in the street,
Over, under, to and fro,
The lean blades meet;
Bay Rum or Bear's Grease,
A silver groat to pay—
Then out a-shin-shan-shining
In the bright, blue day.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *The Barber's*

Figaro

Like most barbers, Julien had his favourite story, and his was a good one and true. His former employer, the Great Riess, had commanded top prices for "Styling" women's hair and had attracted many rich Americans for whom the tariff was special. One of these, an advertising woman, built short and stocky like an embroidered pine tree with head and shoulders, consulted Monsieur Riess and paid her large fee in advance. The master walked around her several times, patted her head, exclaimed, called his wife to witness, and then said:

"Madame! You are already perfect! It would be a sacrilege to disarrange one hair." ELLIOT PAUL, *A Narrow Street*

In the Chair

Motionless victims with their minds on tips—
Wind hair on rollers up towards the back
Anchor pin-curls securely with clips
Some can chat but I haven't the knack
Coiffeurs always get me unnerved
Let hair get dry before unpinning
Keep pin-curls flat with ends well curved
The programme I like is just beginning
How long before I get out of this place?
Mist of spray-set to flatten wisps
Side-sweep fringe to flatter face
Hungry, longing for a packet of crisps . . .
Sleek hair flicks in a swinging bob
Release! He bows over finished job.

ROSIE LEE

Hard Set

Why do I come to this place, thought Hebe gloomily, opening a door and entering a large, stiflingly hot apartment which smelt overpoweringly of green soft-soap solution, perfumed washes, scent and powder, and freshly washed hair. She looked about her at the patient seated figures; some with their wet heads, dripping and wretched, others slowly baking under vast metal hoods with no one paying attention to their cries . . . Fat little men in white coats with combs stuck in their pockets darted about: occasionally they tiptoed to one of the seated figures, lifted up the metal hood, or carelessly pinched the waves under the net, and muttered, " Who *did* your hair, madam? "

" Mr. Fidele—or Mr. Bonaventure, " would reply the victim, on which the little men nodded mysteriously and glided away for another hour or so . . .

Upstairs, an alarming being who was very cross and all done up in a white jerkin like a doctor in an American film, and who looked at your hair as if he hated it (which he probably did), prescribed for those whose locks needed rejuvenating, but Hebe fortunately never had to penetrate so far.

STELLA GIBBONS, *Westwood*

Time for a Lavender Rinse

The matron at her mirror, with her hand upon her brow,
Sits gazing at her lovely face—aye, lovely even now!
Why doth she lean upon her hand, with such a look of care?
Why steals that tear across her cheek? She sees her first grey hair.

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

"Polly-wolly-doodle," said Dr. Clavin to the butler at the door of No. 10

BY STEPHEN FRANCES

KEN MAYNARK and myself became hard-hit small fry in motion pictures when television boomed. So we got high one night, soothing the sting of a wage-cut, and dreamed up a television programme that was pure alcoholic fantasy.

In the cold light of sober day we'd have ditched the idea as ridiculous, but with the alcohol in our arteries bubbling our blood like champagne, Ken was stewed enough to ring up a television producer he knew to sell him the idea.

It happened that the television producer was also on a bender, trying to forget his business troubles which were exactly the opposite of ours. He couldn't find enough television material to feed the hungry, square-eyed millions!

He was more enthusiastic for our idea than we were, and when dawn drifted along we'd planned our first steps. In the television studios, the producer gave us a camera and crew, two recording vans, a half-ton of assorted equipment, and his best wishes.

Two days later we came back with our very first programme recorded on film. The producer saw the rushes and was delighted. Two weeks later he used it as a stop-gap, and the audience appreciation barometer soared so high that very soon Ken and myself were featuring at peak viewing time.

Our programme went like a bomb. But we never quite got over our bewilderment that it was so easy to be so successful. Our idea was new then, but nowadays some form or variation of it has been seen on television all over the world.

We called our programme, *Can You Believe It?* The gimmick was to record a member of the public believing in something that was unbelievable.

For our first show we persuaded the owner of an antique furniture store to let us hide our television cameras and microphones behind his counter. Then we exhibited in the shop window a splintered length of old worm-eaten tent-pole, bearing

the placard, *A fragment of the original lance used by Don Quixote.*

Finally an aged and eccentric souvenir hunter started haggling terms and on the air went *Can You Believe It?*—Don Quixote's shattered lance bought as precious, historical relic.

We sold the Great Boulder Dam to a housewife; two beatniks enthusiastically joined in a conspiracy to steal the Jericho trumpet from the British Museum; a newsagent agreed to sell a stack of evening papers printed in invisible ink, and a nightwatchman somewhat reluctantly agreed to swop his bicycle for a hundred acres on Mars.

The public loved our programme. They saw only our edited version and it gave them the impression that almost everybody we worked on responded with sub-human intelligence. Viewers were flattered too, delighted that they were so much more intelligent than our man-in-the-street. *They* wouldn't have fallen for *that.*

Our programme kept audiences laughing, it earned more money for Ken and myself than we'd dreamed was possible, and it looked as though it was going on for years. But Ken and I grew strangely discontented. Vaguely we felt guilty. Perhaps we were just a couple of charlatans.

A hunger grew inside us to make even one really intelligent man fall for our gags. This became an obsession. We determined to trap just one indisputably intelligent man. We felt that somehow this would be the justification for all the other programmes we had put out.

First, we had to ensure that our victim was highly intelligent. We chose an obscure scientific magazine that catered for the five thousand best brains in the country and inserted a classified advertisement.

Our advertisement was in code—a code based on the stars, planets, and their orbital relationship to each other. We engaged an astronomer to provide the technical facts and a cryptographer to convert mathematical, orbital symbols into our code.

When it was broken down, the coded message read, *Aliens from outer space inhabiting Earth seek cooperation of intelligent human scientists. Write Box . . .*

But whoever broke it down would have to be a first-class brain, an astronomer, a scientist, mathematician, and cryptographer. We were aiming high, of course. But if we had printed the message in plain English, we'd have been deluged with letters from every halfwit in the country.

We ran the advertisement for four weeks and were about to give up when we received our only answer. It was also in code, and was decoded by our cryptographer.

I am most interested. Where may I meet you? Klint Clavin.
We made a wild grab for reference books to check his standing.

We couldn't have wished for a bigger fish on our hook—if he was indeed on our hook! A string of letters as long as the alphabet followed his name; Dr. Klint Clavin was Fellow of a dozen top-ranking societies, author of a score of weighty, scientific tomes.

We rented a quiet suburban house for our interview with him and bugged it with hidden microphones. Seven concealed cameras could take shots of him from all angles.

When Dr. Clavin raised his hand to ring the doorbell, the door opened noiselessly before he could touch it. He stepped inside, looked round curiously and the door silently closed behind him. He wasn't at all perturbed. When a red arrow flashed at the top of the stairs, he followed its direction as casually as though being shown the way by a butler.

The interviewing-room contained a visitor's chair, a plain table, and the chair on which Ken sat. A square plywood box stood on the table.

Dr. Clavin reached the interviewing-room, looked inside, and inquired impassively, "Dr. Instud?"

Ken didn't get to his feet. He just gestured with his hand towards the visitor's chair. "Please sit down, Dr. Clavin."

Our programme owes a great deal of its success to Ken. His deadpan, serious acceptance of ridiculous situations is superb acting.

"You are *the* Dr. Clavin?" asked Ken when the scientist had seated himself. He reeled off a long list of the scientist's impressive qualifications so that our television audience would know they were watching a genuine egghead.

The scientist nodded quietly. "I see you have investigated me." He was a strange-looking man, six feet tall, stoop-shouldered, as thin as a scarecrow, and with a bulging head that wagged on a stick of a neck.

"You understand the significance of my advertisement?" asked Ken.

"I do," the scientist agreed.

"You appreciate that I am an Alien from outer space, and not of Earth?"

"From what planet do you come?" asked Dr. Clavin with a faint note of interest in his voice.

"Saturn," said Ken, deadpan.

Clavin's keen eyes looked him up and down quickly. "Not in your present form, I think," he said dryly.

"Of course not," agreed Ken without a flicker of a smile. "We have adopted human shape and adjusted our metabolism."

"I am interested in your method," said the doctor calmly.

"Molecular reconstitution," said Ken at once, with a casual wave of his hand, "but that is unimportant. Briefly, for reasons I won't go into now, it has become necessary for us Saturnians who inhabit earth to take over control *at once*."

For the first time Clavin looked startled.

"Our plans have been made for a long time," continued Ken remorselessly. "We act tonight at eleven o'clock. At the first chime of Big Ben, our people all over the world will take control of all humans who wield power. It will be a bloodless revolution. At once, Earth's men of power will hold an international conference and reach agreement upon everything."

The scientist was distinctly uneasy. "You have a reason for telling me this?" he asked suspiciously.

"We need intelligent humans to cooperate with us in this bloodless revolution," stated Ken. "The need of such cooperation is vital, Dr. Clavin. We have no time to waste. Can we count upon you?"

For a split second Dr. Clavin hesitated. Then he said loudly and clearly, "You can rely on my cooperation."

In the next room I was hugging myself with delight. We had now achieved far more than I'd ever hoped for. Our great intellectual, Dr. Clavin, had agreed to cooperate with Aliens from outer space in overthrowing the Governments of the world!

"There is one thing I should like to know, however," continued Dr. Clavin. "Why is there such urgency?"

Ken paused dramatically. Then he said, deadpan, "We are not the *only* Aliens on Earth!"

Dr. Clavin stared at him as though hypnotised. The tip of his tongue moistened his lips, and he asked in a strained voice, "Why do you think that?"

I was suddenly afraid that Ken had overplayed his hand. But it is in moments of crisis, when the credulity of our victim is strained to snapping point, that Ken excels himself.

"I don't think," he said flatly, "I *know*. The amazing thing is that Earthmen don't realise it too, instead of inventing ridiculous theories to explain away certain phenomena. We know that the Aliens have established an invasion bridgehead and are about to take over Earth. That is why we must act now."

The scientist gulped. "Ready to take over?" he quavered.

Ken sighed patiently. "The Aliens have assembled a matter transporter and have been operating it for months, utilising a time-warp."

Dr. Clavin's hands were shaking slightly. "How do you know this?" he breathed.

"It is our business to know," said Ken. "Even humans have heard the transporter working. Its supersonic humming has been going on for weeks. You may even have heard it yourself, Dr. Clavin. You live in Kavendish, the heart of the locale whence the humming emanates."

Dr. Clavin was flabbergasted.

I was amazed how convincing Ken could make all this non-sense seem. He never does things by halves. It was a touch of genius to tie in Dr. Clavin with the inexplicable humming about which so many people had been complaining to the newspapers.

"The doorway to Outer Galaxy is wide open," stated Ken. "When the Galaxy invaders wish, they can transport their legions of warriors to take over Earth." Ken paused for a moment to allow a mental mind picture of Earth invaded by strange creatures to develop, and then added casually, "Of course we can't allow that to happen."

Dr. Clavin looked well and truly hooked. His wide, staring eyes were like those of a child gripped by a story in which it believes implicitly. "How will you stop them?" he breathed.

"Our scientists have provided a weapon," said Ken in a matter-of-fact voice. "Tonight at eleven o'clock, when we take over Earth, we shall destroy the Galaxy invaders."

"Destroy them?" whispered Dr. Clavin. "How?"

Ken opened the box on his desk and lowered the four sides to expose a strange, intricate arrangement of bent wire and steel. It looked like a beatnik art exhibit jazzed up with bent and twisted bicycle spokes. "This is our weapon," explained Ken. "We have analysed the supersonic humming and obtained a mentality pattern of the invaders. Our scientists have devised a sensibility reactor which will turn mental thought energy back upon itself. It won't affect Earthmen or Saturnians, of course."

Dr. Clavin stared at the gadget with apprehension. "What will it do to the invaders?"

"Every thought impulse they have will bounce back upon itself," said Ken. He shrugged his shoulders. "They'll sink into a cataleptic state, or run amok, killing one another."

The scientist suppressed a shudder. "Is that the—only machine you have?" he faltered.

"Heavens, no. We've dozens of them," Ken asserted, with confidence.

"I see," said Dr. Clavin.

The interview was running long for a half-hour programme, so Ken brought it crisply to an end. "I can rely upon you then,

Dr. Clavin, to cooperate with us when we take over the World tonight?"

The scientist looked at Ken's gadget. He licked his lips nervously. "Indeed you can," he said with heartfelt sincerity.

"We shall need you immediately we take control of the men of power. I can rely upon you?"

Dr. Clavin squared his shoulders. "You most certainly can."

"In that case, Dr. Clavin," said Ken with deadpan face, "report tonight at No. 10 Downing Street. Arrive at one minute past eleven. Not a moment before. When the door is opened and your business is asked, you must give the codeword: Polly-wolly-doodle."

The scientist gaped. "Polly-wolly-doodle," he echoed foolishly.

"Precisely," said Ken, rising to his feet to indicate the interview was at an end.

"I shall be there, Dr. Instud," said the scientist.

"Good day, Dr. Clavin," said Ken.

"Good day," said Dr. Clavin, and he went out, muttering under his breath.

I was delighted with our success. But Ken is a perfectionist. He still wasn't satisfied. He wanted our cameras covering 10 Downing Street that same night so that millions of viewers could witness Dr. Clavin's final discomfiture as he burbled, *Polly-wolly-doodle*, to a startled Downing Street official.

If he ever did say it, of course. Dr. Clavin was a very intelligent man, and we had to consider the possibility that he had recognised our trap and was planning to turn the tables on us.

We spent the rest of the day rigging up cameras with telescopic lenses to cover the door of number ten from a distance, and secretly planting amplifiers that would catch a whisper a hundred yards away.

Meanwhile an enormous number of people began to ring up the newspapers and broadcasting stations complaining bitterly about the supersonic humming. During the last few hours it had increased its volume tenfold and was agony to those sensitive people who could hear it.

But by nine o'clock that night, people were once again telephoning the newspapers to report that the supersonic humming had stopped altogether. At the time, neither Ken nor myself realised the significance of this.

When the first chime of Big Ben rang out, we were tensed and waiting, already sadly convinced that we hadn't put it over on Dr. Clavin. There wasn't a sign of him. Big Ben struck eleven.

But Dr. Clavin's timing was more accurate than ours. He abruptly rounded the corner into Downing Street, strode along it rapidly, ran up the steps of number ten, and at precisely one minute past the hour he knocked on the front door. It was opened by the butler.

"Polly-wolly-doodle," said Dr. Clavin.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" The butler's face was inscrutable.

"*Polly-wolly-doodle*," repeated Dr. Clavin.

"If you will be so kind as to wait one minute, sir," said the butler suavely and withdrew, thoughtfully closing the door.

Dr. Clavin waited.

We waited. What happens next? we wondered.

What happened next was a police car. It screamed along Downing Street, skidded to a standstill in front of Dr. Clavin, and out leapt four uniformed policemen.

Dr. Clavin stared unbelievingly for several seconds. And then, surprisingly, he attempted to escape them instead of making explanations. For all those policemen knew, Clavin was a potential assassin of the Prime Minister. They dived at Dr. Clavin, brought him down, and piled on top of him.

Dr. Clavin struggled desperately, but escape appeared hopeless. And as though he had suddenly realised it, Clavin did escape! His clothes collapsed abruptly like a car's inner-tube that has been slashed.

From the corner of my eye I thought I glimpsed a scuttling, greeny, scaly, tentacled shape slither away from the discarded clothing a fraction faster than the eye could follow it.

When I looked again it wasn't there.

It was an unlucky break for those policemen. After they'd given an incoherent report to Headquarters to explain why they'd arrested an empty suit, they were transferred from the crime squad to traffic control.

Documents found in the pockets of the suit seemed to be the property of Dr. Clavin but, when interviewed at his home, the scientist suggested a tramp might have stolen his suit which he had just realised was missing. In response to formal police inquiries, the scientist's two laboratory assistants confirmed that for the previous forty-eight hours all three of them had been locked in their laboratory conducting an experiment.

The two laboratory assistants were both tall and stoop-shouldered; their big heads wagged on stick-thin necks.

Ken and myself suspected the awful truth even then, and frantically set about developing the hundreds of feet of film we had shot of Dr. Clavin.

But not one inch of film came out of the darkroom and our

shamefaced staff reported that a strange radiation they didn't understand had caused overexposure of the film. Our one piece of tangible proof had disappeared!

Ken and I went back to making *Can You Believe It?* programmes with morons as our victims, and for a time tried to forget the dreadful truth we had stumbled upon.

With an inspired guess, Ken had divined the significance of the supersonic humming. It really did emanate from a matter transporter. Dr. Clavin was an Alien from outer space, who believed that Ken's gimmicky box could really destroy the mental thought patterns of his race.

After Dr. Clavin's interview, the supersonic humming increased in intensity as the Alien invaders were transported away to Saturn—all except Dr. Clavin, who courageously elected to remain on Earth.

But when Dr. Clavin realised he had been hoaxed, the supersonic humming started again. It's been going on for weeks now! Wherever you are, look around you and you'll see tall, stoop-shouldered men with large heads and scrawny necks. There are four or five times as many of them as there were a few months ago.

You should try something else, too. Give a quick, sideways glance from the corner of your eye and you can sometimes almost see the invaders in their true shape. Greenish, scaly, tentacled shapes that slither faster than the human eye can follow them.

A few weeks ago I saw them only occasionally. Now the streets are swarming with them!

Ken and I have faced up to facts. An Alien race has invaded Earth. We are desperately trying to warn humans that the matter-transporter bridgehead is open wide, and as the supersonic humming intensifies, so invisible Alien hordes flood in on a space time-warp, preparing to enslave mankind.

But Ken and I are like the little boy who cried, "Wolf" too often. Nobody will listen to us.

Not even the morons!

We are frantically trying to convince mankind that Earth is about to be taken over by an Alien race, but . . .

Can You Believe It?

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SOLUTIONS to WATER FROLICS

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1, *Hercules.* 2, *Noah.* 3, *Icarus.* 4, *Kubla Khan.* 5, *Diana.* 6, *The Lady of Shalott.* 7, *Narcissus.* 8, *Ulysses.*

THE BAY

At full moonrise Huwie distinctly heard the change in the sea sound

BY CONNELL BERNARD

THE mackerel always came at certain times of the year, great shoaling pastures of them, to the mile-wide bay called Grugruochn in the dark old tongue, said now to be long since unremembered. Grugruochn—the Marching Bay—had been so called since the time of Saint Colna, the divine mystic, who had lived in the cave on the hill above Penyfrant, the village on the north tip of the bay.

Close against the tiny church where the holy man's cross and relics were tombed up in the altar wall, in the nearest of the dot of cottages that was Penyfrant, lived young Huwie the fisherman, the son of fishermen, with his widowed mother. And down past the tiny harbour slipway, on the sloping shelf of shingle where the herring gulls tore and tussled over stale crab-bait and fish guts, lay beached the *Dora*, his small boat. He made a living with always moderate catches of fish, though when the mackerel came he left the *Dora* where she lay, for the two of them were no match for the trawlers and big powered smacks that took the mackerel by the hundred-ton by netting the approaching miles of the round, land-biting bay.

At these times, and mainly for the sport of it, Huwie would take a stout sea-rod and go out to the straggling rocks by the bay head and catch mackerel until the half-cran basket beside him was overflowing and his arms ached with the constant swing and lift of the rod. Within yards of where he stood the sea would be boiling with arrowing fish, darting, flighting, feeding, biting, and yet not worth a penny a bucketful in hard money.

But the day would be enjoyable; with the wind skimming the salt spray off the wave tops and spuming in his nostrils, with a bite of cheese and homemade bread for his dinner, and shouting aloud his pleasure in the bucking breeze or singing the shanty songs of that strange coastal district, Huwie would make the most of it. Then he would balance the full woven basket across the handlebars of his old bicycle and wheel it back to the cottage, for

the dead fish were valuable manure to the three-quarters of an acre of tilled ground he had behind his home. Hand-ploughed in at the turn of the year or in the spring, they put back into the thin, cindery soil a bit of the heart that his growing vegetables took out.

"Huwie, lad," his mother would say, "it don't 'ardly feel right, you usin' the fish from the bay to spread the land. The times I mention it, yet do it you will."

"Now, Mother, shop fertiliser is a sight too expensive for my liking, an' going up by the sack it is always. The ground needs body, fish-meal an' such, to keep it working. An' the Lord provides the shoals at just the right times."

"It's never our Lord provides the fish that come to Gru-gruochn, Huwie lad. Do you ever see Evans Warning put so much as a fin on his garden, when there's wrack off the beach an' seaweed to be had for as good purpose? No, you don't," the drab, elderly woman would answer herself, "for Evans remembers the old speech, an' the tales."

Huwie knew all about Evans the Warning, the old, old man whose job it was to hoist the weather signals from the crossed mast at the end of his cliff-top cottage garden; but a young, sea-brawny man in his virile prime had no regard for the peculiar stories of a moony, moody old bad-tempered salt, living, certainly a hermit, almost a recluse, on his own with only a drabble-furred Manx cat for company.

"Pooh!" He would scoff at the thought of him. "A soft old man with his brains red with rum, an' not quite right in the 'ead, Mother? I'm surprised at you. A Christian woman, safe in the lee o' St. Colna's at that, worrying about him an' his yarns."

And his mother would sigh. "The spit of your father again, Huwie. I see him in you every day, big an' bold, scorning what he couldn't understand till the old sea took him afore 'alf his appointed time was over."

There would be little more to say, for the conversation invariably reached this point, and then his mother would turn away to get on with some job in the house, tidying the hearth, polishing the blackleaded range, or preparing a meal.

But of the mackerel from the Marching Bay she would have no part, neither eating nor touching them, and Huwie would be forced to slit, clean, and spit them himself if he fancied a dish of them at all.

In the spring past, when he and Jack the Green Man, the son of the publican, had been coming home with a cart laden with bay mackerel—for the other was a young, unheeding man too—they had met Evans Warning on the cliff track with Dwugh,

meaning the Aware One, needling and mewing a pace behind him.

"The nicest o' the day to you, Evans," greeted Jack, knowing, and nudging Huwie. "How about a couple o' fat mackerel for your supper, an' one for Dwughi too? Take your 'eart's pick!"

"Joke will you?" shouted the old man, furious at once. "Poke fun at a old man's fancies will you, Jack the Green?" he thundered. "An' you, laughing there, Huwie. Take care the two o' you. There's never no good come o' takin' an' eatin' the black fish, an' when the mocking churns in your belly like gravel because your gullet is squeezed so tight it can't get out, you'll mind my words, an' remember. Remember when your last sight is what no man should 'ave a mortal sight of!"

And the old weatherwatch would have stormed on and away from the grinning pair of them had not Jack the Green jumped into his path to hold out a brace of the fish.

"Oh, the rubbish of it, Evans," he taunted. "Here, catch!"

He made to throw the fish, but the genuine recoiling terror of Evans the Warning ripped the grins from their faces. The old man fumbled frenziedly at his waistcoat pocket for his relic, snatching the God-splinter out and crossing himself with it thrice, between his eyes then over his breast and genitals, after the old manner. Speaking protection for himself in the long-unused tongue, he almost tumbled away from the two young men in his anxiousness to be gone, with the big tabby cat streaking on in front of him.

"Oh, see him go," cried Jack the Green, though his laugh was through his teeth. "An' the ol' tomcat gone away there like Satan's ratcatcher!"

"Per'aps we shouldn't 'ave taunted him," said Huwie, sorry now, "him being a old man. If he'd had a 'eart attack, why, he could 'ave dropped at our feet."

Something of the old man's fear had made itself plain to him, for a man did not reach for his God-splinter, a precious sliver of wood whittled from his parish altar, unless beset by mortal dread. His own father had carried one, as did every man in those parts and days whose business was with the sea; for it was a mighty comfort in trouble and tempest, and no reverend or minister of a sea-girt community minded that his altar table was so defaced, not for such faith in God.

Jack the Green pitched the mackerel back on to the slate-and-white pile in the cart. "Come on, Huwie," he said. "Evans gives me the bellyache worse'n green apples. Daft as a pickled 'erring, he is."

They walked on, pushing the cart together and agreeing that Evans the Warning was as daft as a pickled herring.

"But it fairly put the breeze up me at the time," admitted Huwie. "An' that peculiar way he put the cross on 'imself."

"Now that I can tell you about," said Jack the Green. "Father's read it all, an' the old ways and tales too. You cross yourself over the fore'ead for no evil to take possession of your mind, over the chest for none to take 'old of your 'eart, an' over your John Thomas so as to pass no evil seed on to your woman. Not that there's fear o' that with Evans the Warning." He laughed coarsely. "He's been past it for years. Could you imagine him . . .?"

And they had laughed out loud . . .

But the incident remained in the back-attic room of Huwie's head, even though they talked on of pleasanter things. Then Jack the Green had said if you want to hear all the old legends of Penyfrant and district come along and talk to Father, whose hobby was the local history, and wanting no prompting to up and spout like a library. Any time at all; the saloon bar, any evening.

Huwie thanked him and said he would, one of the days. They parted company in the village.

"You an' that Jack the Green Man, you been pointing the scorn at my Evans," said Davy Jones, grinning, with teeth like filed razorshells, over Huwie, so close he could smell the rank, raw-fish breath of the dead, green deep. From the rock of his jaw sprouted a great beard of mussels, hermit crabs were alive in his ears, and his eyes were gelid and salt-drowned. "First it's him I'm going to take down to the lockers, an' then you, Huwie boy. Down by the big toes, inch by inch, where there's plenty o' fine fat mackerel to feast on . . ."

Huwie found himself in the greedy sea, clutching desperately at the side of the *Dora*, while Davy Jones and an already drowned Jack the Green tried to pull him down, down, and down . . .

He squealed and shuddered out of sleep, hearing the noise of his nightmare as he woke, still gripping the cold metal of the bedstead rails and sweating as wet as if he had just come out of the bay itself.

"I'll eat no more o' them bloody mackerel," he told his startled-awake mother, coming to the bedside.

"There's never no good," she said.

But that had been in the spring, when the new mackerel of the year were running and he had ploughed the ground rich with the shared carts of fish that he and Jack the Green used for the

same purpose; and both their patches of land had given a satisfying harvest of root vegetables and greens as a result. Besides, the bold scoffing soon returns in men so young and headstrong, with livings to make and fish to catch, boats to paint, nets and tackle to tend and mend; with ground to till, and summer girls to love on promise, and beer to drink bravely in The Green Man.

It was July now, under the apple trees in the pub garden, with pints on the deal table, shandies for their girls and a still-hot day to take the chill off the tale. Jack the Green had persuaded his father to tell them the legend of Grugruochn, the Marching Bay.

"Well, the old word doesn't quite mean marching, like—oh, like soldiers," said Big Jack, "but more like a mass of people going out of somewhere, leaving a place," he endeavoured to explain. "Something like the exodus," he said, being a Bible-read man.

Then he went on to tell them the story . . .

Many a hundred years gone by, when people, being too ignorant to write, passed it down by word, Saint Colna had lived, fasting, praying, and healing in the cave above Penyfrant. He was known afar for his power to cure every ailment by the laying-on of his hands. It was his habit too to fish the bay and distribute his catch among the poor and deserving. One day, when the saint was in middle age and at the height of his God-given powers, he founded his little church on the spot where a heathen place of worship had been, thus making holy a wicked place. But just after that the plague had come upon the village, and the sickening, the near-dead, and the dead had been carried to the bay and thrown in by the cartload.

Calling upon God to give him all-power, lest they be stricken to a man, Saint Colna laid hands upon every sick body and succeeded in drawing out the scourge. There was no more death.

The saint, planning to take the disease away for ever, cautioned the villagers to fish the bay no more. Then he walked alone to Grugruochn.

"And there they stood watching at the bay head, what few as was left," said the publican, in closing. "Saint Colna strode down the sands, never halting at the sea edge, and he walked into the waves with his hands and arms seething black with the plague, until he disappeared from view."

Even the girls, till then silly with shandy, had listened with curious fascination. Huwie was moved out of his silence to make a question.

"But I don't understand," he said, "about telling the villagers not to fish in—"

"—the bay?" said Big Jack. "Well, the old chronicle gives him as saying that the bay was to be fished no more for he and his flock—the dead they'd already cast in, you understand—would be needing all the fish there was. It was not till then the shoals started to come. And even though it's only a tale hereabouts, the penalty makes you shudder at it."

They waited on his coming words.

"It ends by recording that the saint said whosoever persisted in disregarding this would see the drownded of all time come marching out of the sea, with him at the head, to bring back the plague. Still—" the publican added a sensible note—"take it with a pinch of salt is my advice. There's a good few fished the bay, on and off, for donkeys' years, and nobody's come back from the dead yet, not to my knowledge."

Jack the Green had gone to fetch more beer while his father was talking, returning just in time to hear the last. Creeping quietly across the garden lawn behind them, he suddenly seized one of the unaware girls round the waist.

"Got you!" he snarled in her ear. "Saint Colna's back from the dead!"

And the cold spell was broken.

They jumped and shrieked out of pleasurable terror, safe in the homely pub garden, and had shandy and crisps, and more shandy until, by talking of it with familiarity, they gave the tale their sniggering contempt.

Then, in the late dusk, they were walking and playing the fool down the mellow lanes. Their escorts foolishly imitated the bogeyman saint, thrilled them with the chase and capture, and pulled them giggling under the leafy hedges where they all forgot everything in the making of their muddle-headed love . . .

The year continued to turn, changing through autumn into harvest time. When the land was being cleared of vegetables, lying just now empty and fallow, the time for the mackerel shoaling came again.

"An' not before it's time," said Jack the Green. "I dare say the last week o' September'll see us up the bay again with the cart."

A day or two later they saw the trawler fleet out in the sea-distance between the bay points, strung out and busy, already lumpishly riding the swell with wells full of fish. A few belching old smacks, funnelling along unsteadily, were smudging the pencilled horizon with greasy black smoke.

"There'll be a shoal in the bay tomorrow," the two men decided.

It rained for a day and a night, and then it was clear; Huwie and Jack the Green, delighted, fished the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, taking advantage of the good weather, for on that part of the coast the season brought sweeping rainstorms that sheeted in off the sea sometimes for days on end.

They usually fished from the late afternoon until midnight, that being the time when the fish were feeding so fast that they took the feather lures the instant they were under the surface. On the Thursday afternoon, pushing the cart down to the rocks, they had seen Evans the Warning up on the cliff, with Dwugh the Aware One arched on a rock beside him. The old man had shouted something that the wind had borne away, gesticulating angrily when Jack the Green had replied with some wind-carried rudeness of his own.

"Silly old sod," he muttered. He gobbed his disgust into a gorse bush.

"We ought to go up there one o' the nights an' cover his windowledges an' doorsteps with mackerel," suggested Huwie. "Oh, that'd teach him, right enough."

"Yes, an' lay 'em all down his garden path, an' in a ring round the cottage," said Jack the Green. Anything for mischief, and the manly strap of the two of them would keep them out of any trouble. He laughed at the idea. "Let's do it, tomorrow. It's Friday. Why, the silly old sod would stay in his 'ouse till the following Monday rather'n step over the circle."

Friday morning showed that the weather was changing, with the signs blowing up out of the west, and uncertainty making the grazing animals stay in the lee of the wind-fleeced hedges; the wise rooks and jackdaws perched lower in the church elms. But by the afternoon the sky had not worsened and the two young men, deciding they could take a catch, set off after tea for Grugruochn.

"It'll stay clear till per'aps early in the morning," said Jack the Green. "The wind's tacking seawards now. It shouldn't change afore midnight."

Leaving the handcart in the usual place they took their tackle down to where a long spit of tumbling rocks wandered out to sea. They clambered along to their favourite places, a stone's throw from one another, and settled down to the fishing with their crans against them.

From that moment until well on into the evening Huwie began to feel uncomfortable under the eye that he could not know was upon him. They took not one fish and, cast where they

might, the lines drifted slackly back against the rocks at their feet. Jack the Green happened to notice him first.

"Look," he cried, pointing upwards. "There's bloody Evans up yonder. No wonder we're taking nothing. I bet he's been there all the time, putting the look on us, he has."

The silhouette of the old, old man, blue with distance, stood out against the smoke-red embers of the smouldering sky.

"Get on 'ome, you're frightening the bloody mackerel," muttered Jack the Green, knowing it was useless to shout.

He was amazed to see the watcher turn on that instant, half look back, shake his head, and plod away along the cliffs. He was soon out of sight.

"There now. He's given us up as a bad job, Huwie. Don't be surprised if we hook a few now."

Quite remarkably they then caught a few fish, not an abundance, but enough to keep them from being bored with the prospects as the hours went by.

It was just at full-moonrise that Huwie distinctly heard the change in the sea-sound. Where the lapping waves had slapped gently against the brittle slate rocks, they changed while he listened to a champing sound, almost as if they were trying to eat out the rock from underneath him. As the sky had steadily darkened the wind began to veer and harry the scuds and storm-suds back into the brooding landmass behind the fishermen. It scurried through the sparse patches of whins on the cliff-face like hurrying armies of rats. The sea was gunmetal and menacingly slick.

"It—it sounds like the weather's breaking, Jack," he said, for something to say.

Jack the Green seemed not to be perturbed.

"I think I'll take a mooch up the cliff," he said, "an' put a couple o' stones under the wheels o' the cart. This old wind could pitch it into the sea, it could."

Left on his own, Huwie could not account for the sudden flurry of thoughts that came to him in that lonely place. The immediate company of Jack the Green had been strong enough to repel the intrusion into his mind of previous snatches of conversation and scenes and memories. He wanted to tell himself something reassuring out loud, but suddenly became convinced that he could not. Grugruochn was testing his mettle, he decided; how whatever it was would laugh to see him throw down his rod and run panicking after Jack the Green like a windy boy in a boneyard.

Yet the incidents, and more than that, the actual words, were oppressing him. Remember when your last sight is what no

man should have a mortal sight of, said Evans the Warning; whosoever persisted would see the drownded of all time, said Big Jack. There's never no good, said his mother.

The drownded, the drowned dead of all time.

What—what if all those that the sea had ever claimed, the sailors, shipwrecked and castaway, the fishermen, those committed to the deep, the accidentally taken, the murdered, the children, those taken in time of war, and peace, from his father's and grandfather's day, from the eighteen-, seventeen-, and sixteen-hundreds, and back, far beyond then, what if they all suddenly began to emerge from the sea, and marching one or two hundred abreast they trooped up the broad flat sands of the bay? The dead, living again, in their soaked regiments and columns, barnacle-boned and moist-fleshed, their eye-sockets empty, their skulls the homes of sea creatures, their nostrils bleeding seaweed, naked or part-clothed in suit, dress, or uniform, coming up out of the yielding water and walking on across the land for ever . . .

"I wedged the 'andcart," said Jack the Green loudly, not a minute later. "The wind cuts you like a scythe up the top."

"What do you say we chuck it for tonight?" A relieved Huwie found his voice. "It must 'ave gone eleven, an' I don't like the look o' things much."

"Give it till midnight," persuaded Jack the Green. "Just to see if we can fill a cran between us."

For no special reason, gazing out after his line on the dark heave of the water, Huwie was minded to drum his thumbs on the cork grip of the rod, in an insistent, compelling rhythm that seemed to come from nowhere in particular: *d-rum*, *d-rum*, *d-rum*, *d-rum*.

"I wish to 'ell you'd stop that bloody drumming," called Jack the Green after a while. "It gets on your nerves."

"I stopped ten minutes ago."

He listened, and the faint, sea-muffled sound came to them both from down in the bay: *d-rum*, *d-rum*, *d-rum*, *d-rum*. Huwie found that his thumbs were moving again in sympathy with the distant pulsing.

They should have run from that terrible place then, to leave both rods and handcart to be collected, perhaps, in sane daylight, when the intimidating night, the wind and the sea, the pounding rocks, and their heads could not play tricks with them. All the while the rhythm, the stirring, beckoning rhythm, was growing; and they knew there was nowhere to run to.

When the mocking churns in your belly like gravel because your gullet is squeezed so tight you can't get it out, you'll mind my words . . . *When your last sight* . . .

It was too late. The dark power, released by folly, had fixed them. Huwie, unable to speak, wrenched at Jack the Green's arm to draw his attention; he nodded his fearing head towards the shore.

There was a small, slight figure standing down at the rim of the sea, its back to the land. In the moonlight, which had become pitiless now in its brightness, they saw it to be a uniformed drummer-boy, lost once from a ship with wooden walls, rigidly patterning the sound on his side-slung military drum: *d-rum, d-rum, d-rum.*

Huwie threw up his hand and bit his knuckles raw with horror.

Then they saw that the sea in the bay was disturbed and breaking white far out; but no amount of mackerel could churn the water like that, moving ever closer to the land.

Jack the Green began to gibber as he saw the first bobbing heads break water; he shuddered and spewed wretchedly. Huwie felt the guts dry inside him; his mind screamed enough to flood his head but nothing spilt out of his mouth, only the fluent gabble, along with Jack, of the dark old speech they never knowingly had.

For there they were rising, marching out of the sea, the shoals of all the drowned, more even than the numberless, saint-blessed mackerel; the multitudes in their threatened exodus, the plague-dead leading. And at the front the striding saint, his hands and arms black with the seething dread.

Huwie felt his hands burning and looked down to see the black scabs sprouting on his flesh, bursting and suppurating as they formed, blossoming like foul little flowers.

The footsteps of the recalled made no noise upon the washed, wet sand. But Evans the Warning and Dwugh, hugging the peat fire in his cottage, heard the hush of their coming.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

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YMA DREAM

This is going to be
a bit of all right, I think

BY THOMAS MEEHAN

IN this dream, which I have had on the night of the full moon for the past three months, I am giving a cocktail party in honour of Yma Sumac, the Peruvian singer. This is strange at once, for while I have unbounded admiration for four-octave voices, I have never met Miss Sumac, and, even in a dream, it seems unlikely that I should be giving her a party. No matter.

She and I are in the small living-room of my apartment, on Charles Street, in Greenwich Village, and we are getting along famously. I have told her several of my Swedish-dialect stories, and she has reciprocated by singing for me, in Quechua, a medley of Andean folk songs. Other guests are expected momentarily. I have no idea, however, who any of them will be.

Miss Sumac is wearing a blue ballgown and I am in white tie and tails. Obviously, despite the somewhat unfashionable neighbourhood and the cramped quarters of my apartment, it is to be a pretty swell affair. In any case, I have spread several dishes of Fritos about the room, and on what is normally my typing table there is a bowl of hot *glügg*.

The doorbell rings. A guest! I go to the door, and there, to my astonished delight, is Ava Gardner. This is going to be a bit of all right, I think.

"Tom, darling!" she says, embracing me warmly. "How wonderful of you to have asked me."

In my waking hours, unfortunately, I have never met Miss Gardner. In my dream, though, my guests seem to know me rather intimately, while, oddly, none of them seem to know each other. Apparently it is their strong common affection for me that has brought them to Charles Street. For my part, although I immediately recognise each guest as he or she arrives, I have no memory of having ever met any of them, or, for that matter, of having invited them to a party in my apartment.

On with the dream, however. "Miss Ava Gardner," I say, "I'd like you to meet Miss Yma Sumac."

"Charmed," says Miss Sumac.

"Delighted," counters Miss Gardner.

"Ah, but Tom," says Miss Sumac, with an enchanting laugh—which runs up the scale from E above middle C to C above high C—"let us not, on this of all occasions, be formal. Por favor, introduce each guest only by the first name, so that we may all quickly become—how shall I say?—amigos."

Typical Peruvian friendliness, I think, and reintroduce the two. "Ava, Yma," I say.

We sit around for some time, sipping *glügg* and munching Fritos. Things seem to be going well. The doorbell rings again. The second guest is a man—Abba Eban, the former Israeli Ambassador. Again I make the introductions, and, bowing to the wishes of the guest of honour, keep things on a first-name basis. "Abba, Yma; Abba, Ava," I say.

I stifle a grin, but neither Miss Sumac nor my two other guests see anything amusing in the exchange. We chat. The bell rings again, and I am pleased to find Oona O'Neill, Charlie Chaplin's wife, at the door. She is alone. I bring her into the room. "Oona, Yma; Oona, Ava; Oona, Abba," I say.

We are standing in a circle now, smiling brightly but not talking much. I sense a slight strain, but the party is young and may yet come to life. The bell again. It is another man—Ugo Betti, the Italian playwright. A bit hurriedly, I introduce him to the circle. "Ugo, Yma; Ugo, Ava; Ugo, Oona; Ugo, Abba," I say.

Miss Sumac gives me an enigmatic glance that I try to interpret. Boredom? Thirst? No, she looks almost *irritated.* Hastily, I replenish everyone's glass. For some reason, I begin to hope that no other guests have been invited.

The doorbell rings once again, however, and I open the door on two lovely actresses, Ona Munson and Ida Lupino. This gives me a happy inspiration for my introductions. "Ona and Ida," I say, "surely you know Yma and Ava? Ida, Ona—Oona, Abba." Damn! It doesn't come out even. "Ida, Ona—Ugo," I finish lamely.

I have scarcely given Miss Munson and Miss Lupino their first drinks when I am again summoned to the door. My guests stand stony-faced as I usher in the new arrival, the young Aga Khan. He is looking exceptionally well turned out in a dinner jacket with a plaid cummerbund. Smiling too cheerfully, I introduce him to the waiting group. "Folks," I say, using a word I have always detested, "here's the Aga Khan! *You* know." But there is silence, so I must continue. "Aga—Yma, Ava, Oona, Ona 'n' Ida, Abba 'n' Ugo."

I begin to have the feeling that there is an unmistakable pall

descending over my party. I suggest a game of charades. This is met with glacial looks from everyone, including Miss Gardner, whose earlier affection for me has now totally vanished. When the doorbell rings this time, everybody turns and glares at the door. I open it and discover another pair—Ira Wolfert, the novelist, and Ilya Ehrenburg, the *Russian* novelist. The latter, I know, is quite a man-of-the-world, so I try a new approach.

"Ilya," I say, "why don't you just introduce yourself and Ira? You know all these lovely people, don't you?"

"Nyet," says Mr. Ehrenburg. "Can't say that I do."

"Oh, all *right*," I say. "Ilya, Ira, here's Yma, Ava, Oona. Ilya, Ira—Ona, Ida, Abba, Ugo, Aga."

I ask Miss Sumac to sing for us. She refuses. We continue with the *glügg* and some hopelessly inane small talk. Mr. Eban and the Aga Khan stand at opposite sides of the room, eyeing each other. I begin to wish I'd never given the goddam party. Ona Munson jostles Ugo Betti's elbow by accident, spilling his drink. I spring forward to put them at their ease, whipping a handkerchief from my pocket.

"Never mind!" I cry. "No damage done! Ugo, you go get yourself another drink. I'll just wipe this *glügg* off the, uh, *rügg*." The guests fix me with narrowed eyes.

At this moment, Eva Gabor, the Hungarian actress, sweeps through the door, which I have cleverly left open. Unaware of the way things are going, she embraces me and turns, beaming, to meet the others.

Inevitably, I must make the introductions. I start rapidly. "Eva, meet Yma and Ava and Oona—" But then I find that Miss Gabor is pausing to hug each guest in turn, so I am forced to make the remaining introductions separately. "Eva, Ona; Eva, Ida; Eva, Ugo; Eva, Abba; Eva, Ilya; Eva, Ira; Eva, Aga."

This is a *terrible* party. All the men have bunched up. We stand in a circle, glowering at one another. I can think of nothing to say. I feel oddly hemmed in, like a man who is about to be stoned to death.

"Am I late?" asks the actress Uta Hagen gaily as she comes tripping into the room.

"No, no!" I say, gallantly taking her arm and steering her at once towards the punch bowl and away from the others.

"Please have the common decency to introduce your guests to one another," says Miss Sumac, in a cold monotone. "And in the proper manner."

In the dream, Yma Sumac seems to have some kind of hold over me, and I must do as she wishes. "O.K., O.K.," I snap

crossly. "Uta, Yma; Uta, Ava; Uta, Oona; Uta, Ona; Uta, Ida; Uta, Ugo; Uta, Abba; Uta, Ilya; Uta, Ira; Uta, Aga; Uta, Eva." I turn to see if this has placated Miss Sumac, but she coldly ignores me. I have begun to hate her.

I discover that the *glügg* has run out. In the hope that no further company will arrive, I silently close the door. The bell rings instantly, however, and I feel a chill run down my spine.

"Answer the door," Miss Sumac says peremptorily. My circle of guests moves menacingly towards me. With a plummeting heart, I open the door. Standing before me, in immaculate evening dress, is a sturdy, distinguished-looking man. He is the Polish concert pianist Mieczyslaw Horszowski.

"Come in, Mieczyslaw!" I cry, with tears in my eyes. "I've never been so glad to see anyone in my whole life!"

And here, always, my dream ends.

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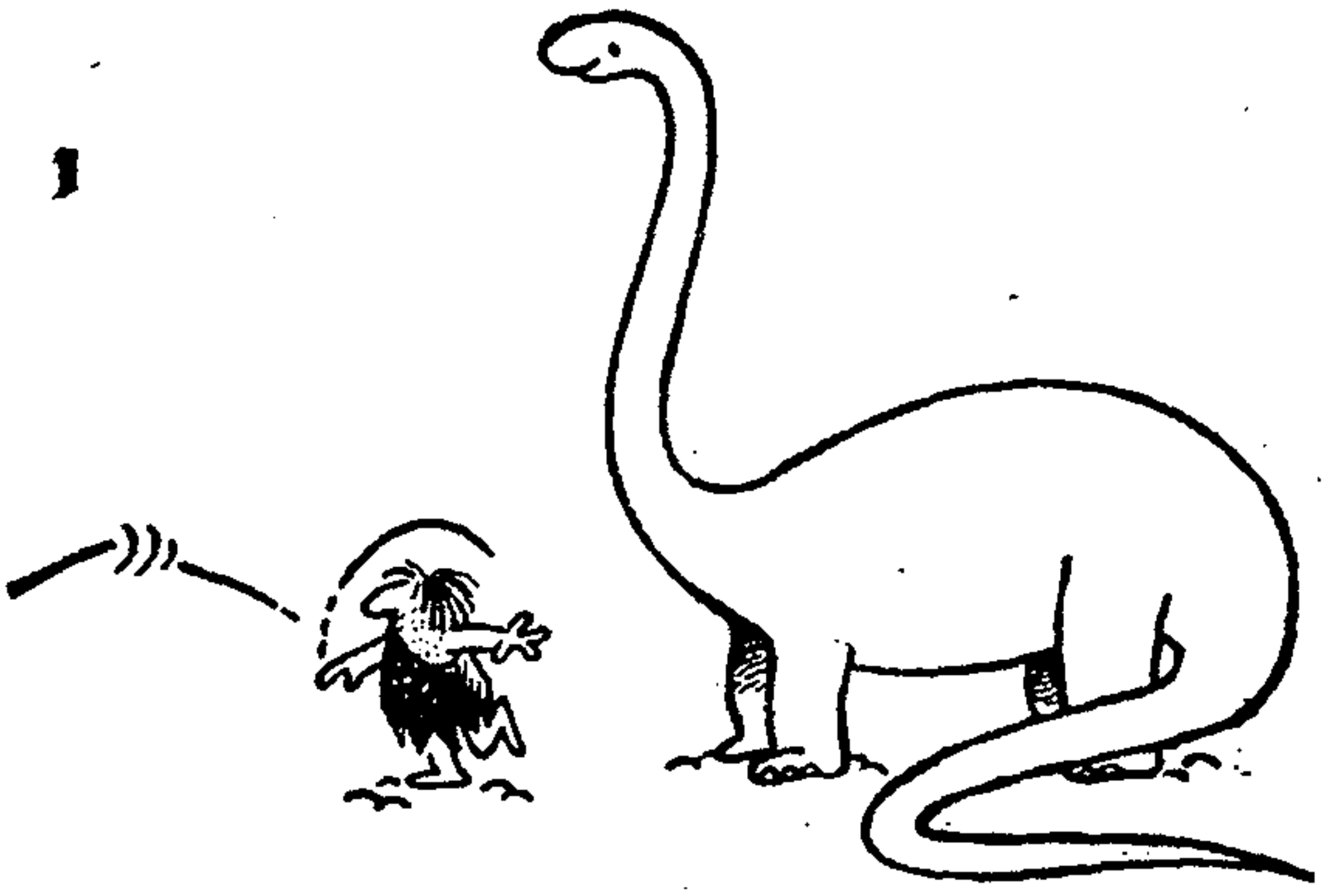

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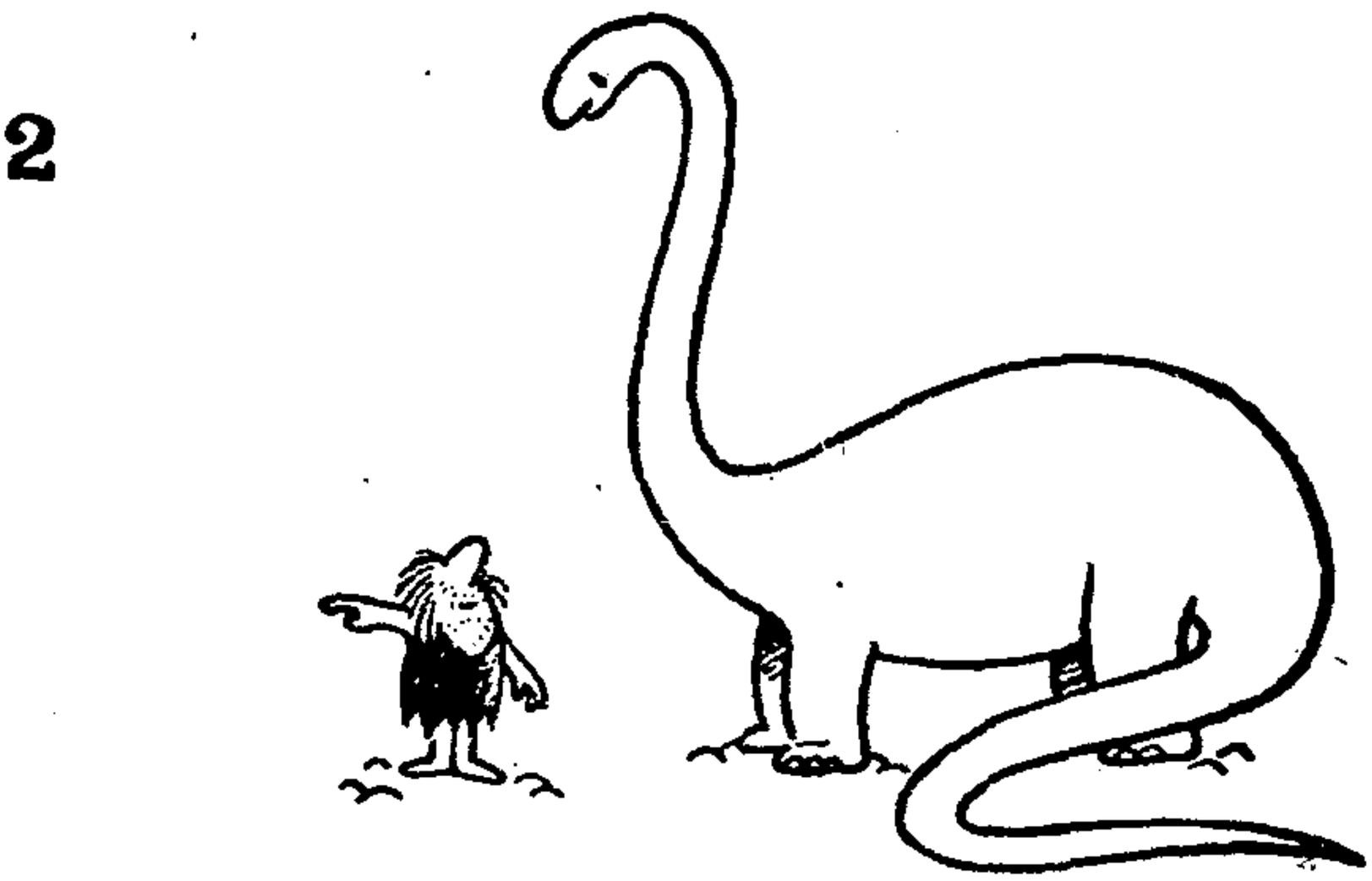

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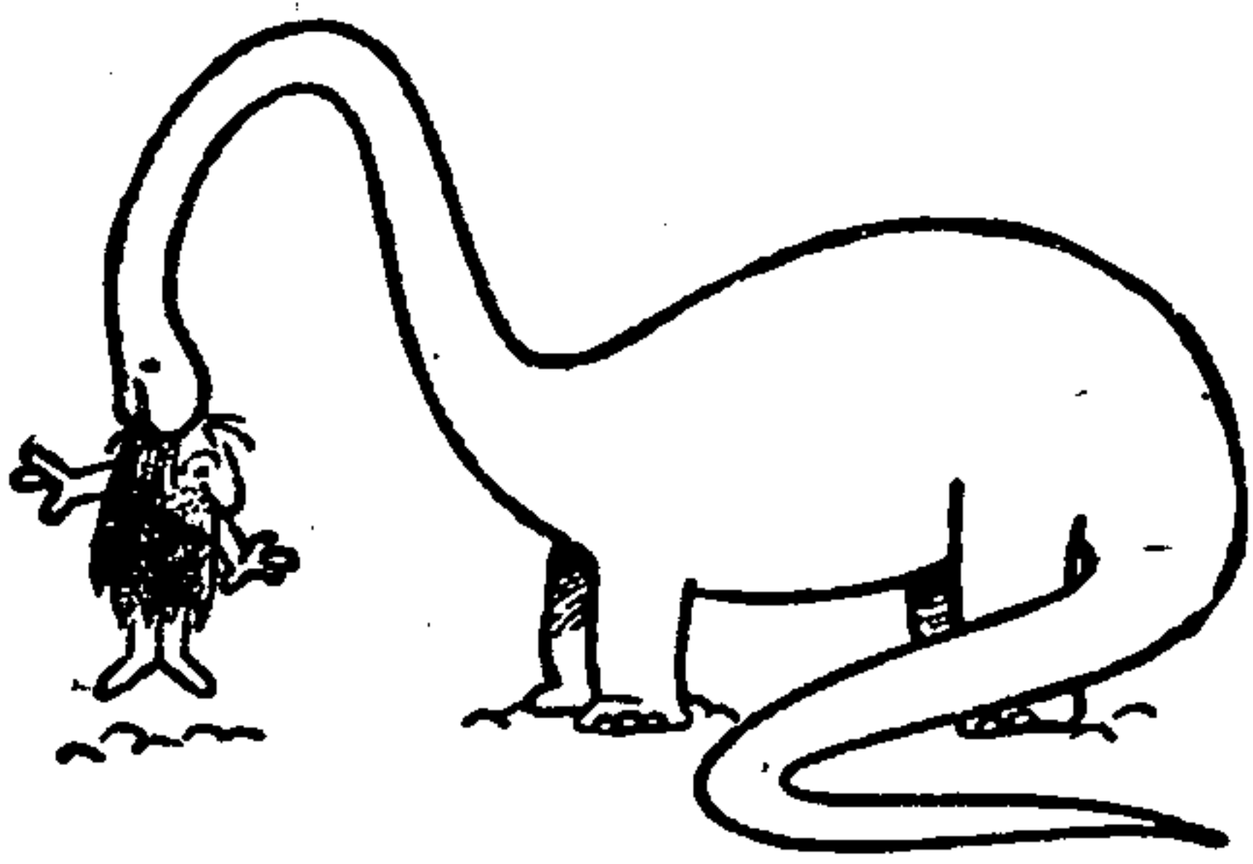

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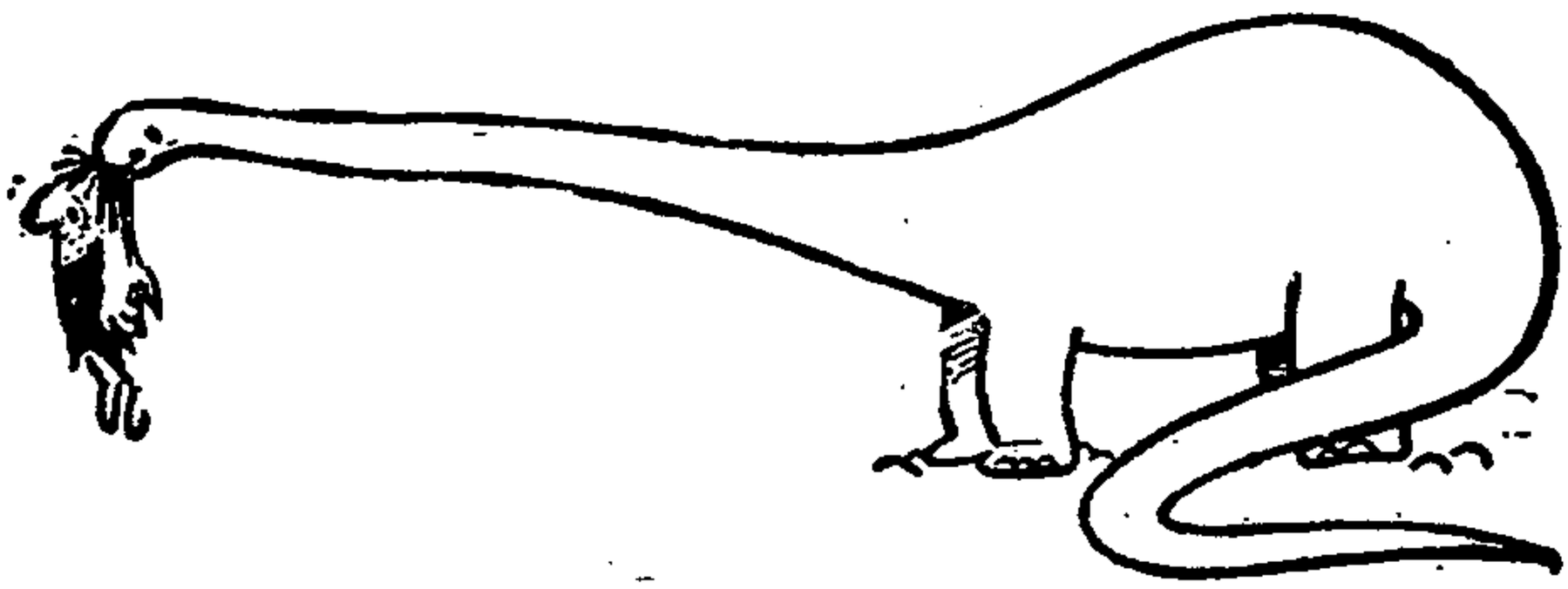

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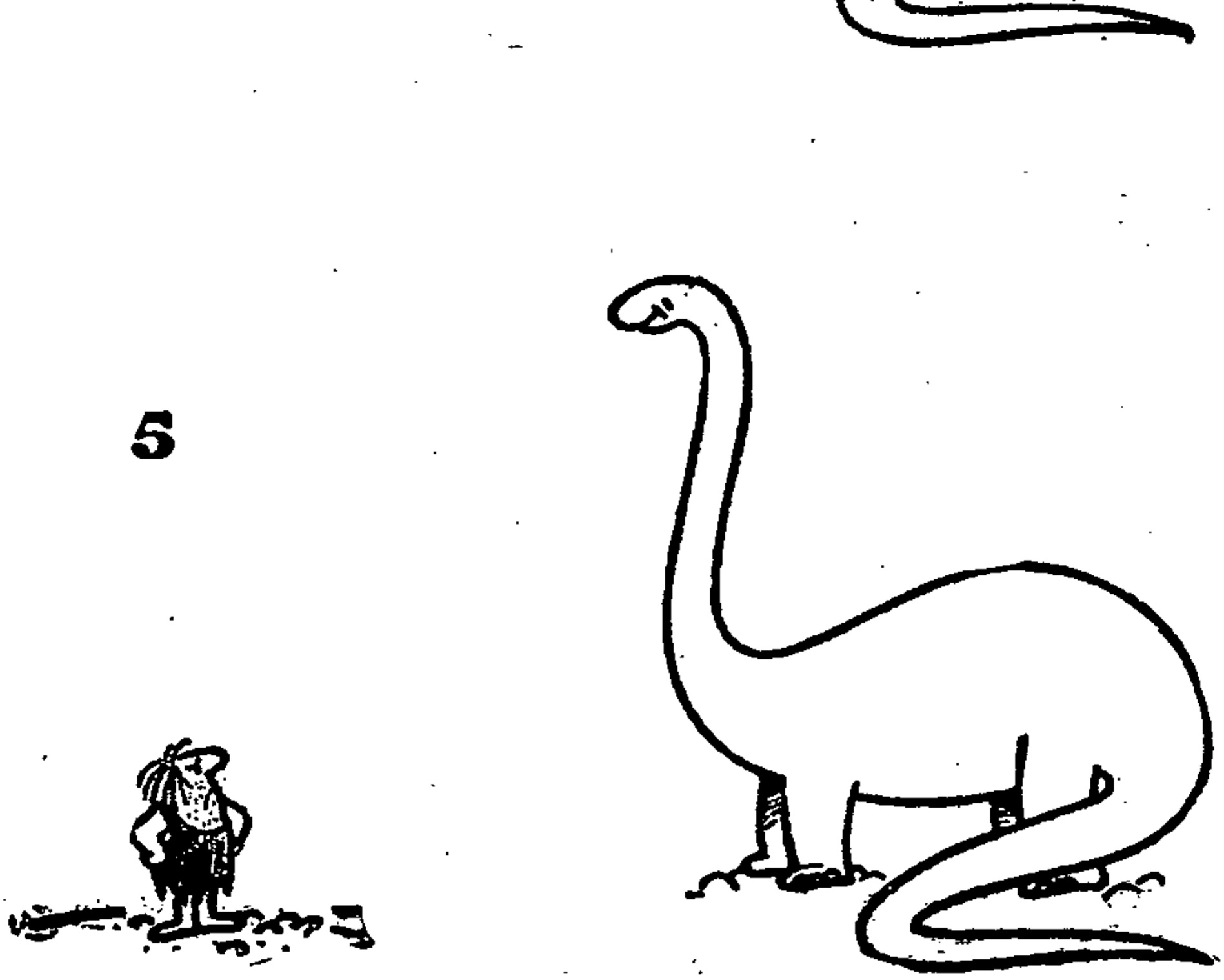

THE MAN IN THE WOOD

By EDWARD HYAMS

THIS forest, Hardy reflected, called "New" ever since it was planted eight hundred years ago by a Norman king with a passion for hunting and no scruples about razing Saxon villages, was, in fact, newer than the woods of his native New York state, since they were primeval. Yet this one, with its open glades, immemorial oaks, and half hidden villages, felt enormously older. Forests in nature have no age; they are new every fine morning. It was history that conferred antiquity, not time. The New Forest was as old as what one understood by the word "England."

When Warburg and Dufresne sent Hardy—Edmund Baron Hardy—to take over the London office, he was able to do himself well. His salary was raised, of course; and then there was the famous W & D Overseas Service Allowance; finally, he found that his money was worth twice what it had been in New York. He got value for it, too; that was in his own nature, and in addition he had his wife's guidance.

Betty Hardy was English. They had married when he was sent to England in the last year of the war and both of them were twenty-four. Betty had liked New York. She had, as she put it, "gone native" and even thought that she had lost her English accent, which made their friends smile. In fact she had never lost her Englishry; Hardy liked it that way.

The forest was growing dark and he switched on the sidelights of his car and glanced at the dashboard clock. Half past nine. He should reach the house by eleven. This Friday night drive had become habitual during the summer which Betty and the children spent at the house they had bought at Galston Chine where the children could swim and Betty had her garden, and Hardy himself could get some sailing. They did not close the London flat, because his work kept him in town all week and sometimes, rarely, even at weekends.

England had one great advantage: a lot of different kinds of country in a small space. Hardy liked it. He wanted to go home one day, not too late for their final settlement on the coast of Maine,

where he was born and where the house which had been his family's for four generations would come to him. But for the time being he was happy in England.

Old John Dufresne, his pink face benevolent above his winged collar, peering through his pince-nez spectacles—where the devil did he get such things nowadays?—had told him, " Stick it for ten years, and don't make more than two mistakes a year. Then we'll bring you home as one of the two overseas vice-presidents." That was all right: Hardy could " stick it " very comfortably.

He settled lower in the driving-seat. The light was a gloaming now, the worst light to drive by: too much daylight for headlamps and not enough to see by. He put his hand in his pocket for a cigarette, then took it out again as a figure—he could not at once see whether man or woman—stepped out from a group of oaks into the middle of the road and stood there with outstretched arms. A girl in jeans and sloppy joe sweater. She had very long legs. No ordinary hitchhiker: she was not signalling diffidently for a lift;

she was forcing him to stop by not moving from the middle of the road until he had done so.

Hardy stuck his head out of the window as she, keeping one hand on the car as if to make sure that he could not drive on, came round to the side and said, " Mister, will you give us a lift? "

Hardy would have described himself as a careful man, orderly, law-abiding, running his life by rules. If he was sometimes aware of another, wilder creature under the skin of good citizenship, he had never had cause to pay that other much attention. This girl, emerging inexplicably from the sombre forest, was by no means his sort.

He took the flashlamp from its clip beside the door and, without apology, turned its beam on her face. The girl half closed her eyes and quickly raised a hand, as if in self defence. Hardy's inspection told him nothing but that she was pretty and rather dirty, or at least unkempt, with reddish-brown hair loose to the shoulders. She blinked in the light and said, " Will ye, mister? "

Her English was of a kind he had not heard before. He was familiar with the " standard " English of his wife's friends and his own business associates; and he knew cockney. This was not quite cockney though it had the same whine.

He said, " Where you bound for? "

She hesitated and then, with a questioning note as if she were making a suggestion, not stating a fact, said, " Bournemouth."

" I go through there. Come round the other side and jump in."

He could not abandon her there, in the middle of the forest, on a road which, albeit usually busy with trucks, for the moment seemed deserted. But he was uneasy. There had been something in her face, or her eyes, and in the sound of her voice, a faint echo of something he had not heard for nearly twenty years, not since he and Sergeant Conolly and Ike Bamburg had burst into that farmhouse on the Cherbourg-Falaise road, and the three Germans, all very young, had backed away from them, white-faced, hands raised, and one, the youngest, talking fast, incomprehensibly, but obviously pleading for his life with pale blue popping eyes fixed on the grenade in Ike's hand. This girl, too, was badly frightened: Hardy was sure of it.

He drove on. For two or three minutes neither of them said anything, but it seemed to Hardy that the girl had brought a tension with her into the car. Not to mention the cheap scent she smelled of. He did not know how to talk to her. An Englishman, he reflected, would not even have tried. He said, " A fine night."

" It's all right. Got a fag, mister? "

" Sure. Here, help yourself. This dingus is a lighter. You press it till it gets red-hot and then lift it out . . . so."

The cigar-lighter, a present from Betty, glowed and faded, glowed again as the girl used it to light her cigarette. She inhaled audibly, breathed out smoke in two thin jets through her nostrils, and rested her head on the back of the seat. He said, " My name is Hardy, Edmund Hardy. What's yours? "

"Annette," she said curtly, as if even that was revealing too much. After a pause, she said, "You're American, aren't you?"

"I am."

"It's the way you talk."

"And here's me thinking I'd learnt to talk like an Englishman!"

That was by way of being a joke but she took it seriously and said, "Why? Why should ye want to? Being American's all right, seems to me. It's where I want to go."

He knew it all: there seemed to be two kinds of English, those who thought America was hell and the Americans devils, and those who thought it was heaven and the Americans—well, not quite angels, maybe. This girl was one of the few—perhaps not so few at that—who still thought of the States as the Never-Never Land. Her voice became animated when she spoke of it. As an American he probably represented, for her, first wealth, of course, but above all the glamour of the latter-day Cockaigne. Power, too, and things like the music and the kind of attitude to life that she admired. The poetry of the juke box. The gorgeous West instead of an earlier generation's gorgeous East. The land where youth was triumphant and eternal and where Elvis Presley was born. Hardy sighed.

But the girl not only roused his curiosity; she excited him by her strangeness. Each spoke a dialect of a common tongue, but came from tribes remote. Hardy smiled in the darkness; he was thinking of her as a kind of savage maiden. No princess, certainly, yet a kind of Pocahontas for all that, dressed as a sort of beast yet native to this ancient "New" forest. Her family, maybe, had herded swine under these oaks when William Rufus whom the Saxons hated fell to an arrow shot, some said, by a churl who had had enough of Norman arrogance.

Hardy said, "You were born here? You live in the forest?"

"We don't live anywhere much," she said cryptically; and then, "We're travellers."

Hardy was not sure what she meant. Caravan people, maybe; not real gipsies, not with that clear and tanless skin—he had noticed her English-rose complexion. To make sure, he said, "You mean gipsies?"

"Not likely! Not that lot!"

It was a rebuke: he had said the wrong thing. He tried again.

"I meant, of course, caravan folk."

"That's right."

Hardy had seen something of these nomads. Betty's father, a London stockbroker, had a hundred-acre fruit farm in east Kent. And every summer from June to September it had its squalid encampment of caravans and old cars and its transient population of cherry pickers, plum pickers, apple and pear pickers, working hard all day for high pay, crowding the pub at night, noisy, wild, feral, contemptuous of the law and the prophets, and giving trouble to the village constable. So Annette was one of these.

From his first sight of these people Hardy had taken an interest

in them which was almost morbid, or so it seemed to him, so that he hid it. They were foreigners in their own country, alien not only to that country but to the settled way of life everywhere. Nobody and no economic pressures had driven them into their wandering life, in a country where there were too many jobs for too few people. Their rejection of the order which Hardy himself so completely stood for, attracted him while it outraged him. Having this girl beside him was like preparing to break a powerful taboo.

They came to open common land, clear of trees. There, standing back from the road behind a cinder-covered parking space, was a long, low, shack-like building, garishly lit, and with a score of big trucks parked in front of it. A juke box was raucously audible.

Hardy braked and said, " Like a cup of coffee? "

" I could do with it—and more," the girl said.

" Hungry? "

" I 'aven't ate since yesterd'y."

" Say, that won't do! We must certainly do something about that! "

She had not said it as an appeal; it was not a claim to be starving for want of money to buy food. But it seemed to him that telling him this fact had reminded her of the reason for it, whatever that was, because as they came into the aura of bright light streaming from the open doors and windows of the pull-up Hardy, glancing at her for the first time since he had flashed the lamp in her face, again saw the look which he identified as fear. Moreover, she seemed to hang back at the door of the pull-up, as if afraid of what she might see if she went in.

Hardy put a hand on her arm and steered her through the doorway, and he could feel the quiver in her flesh, the vibrant tension of an animal driven by hunger or curiosity against the prompting of its own instinct.

Inside was a single, long, narrow room with a rank of plastic-topped tables along one matchboard wall whose blistered paint was partially concealed by mineral water advertisements depicting lush girls in black underwear. Across the narrow aisle in which truck drivers carrying their trays from the self-service pen got in each other's way, was a long counter, part cook-shop with steaming tea and coffee urns, the rest being devoted to the sale of cigarettes and tobacco, sweets, and other trifles. A rank smell of frying onions, sausages, bacon, and chips rose, visible as a blue haze, above the huge frying kettles. The noise, compound of thirty or forty powerful voices pitched above the general clamour to which each contributed, and a juke box which added a singularly inappropriate booming note to the sexless, wailing voice of a pop singer, was as rank as the smell.

The manifold gross assault upon the senses did not trouble Hardy, it stimulated him. That suppressed side of him which was not exactly at home in, but powerfully drawn by, the coarse life of this latter-day caravanserai, came briefly uppermost,

overcoming such fastidious distaste as he felt. As for Annette, he saw at once that she was at home, that this was her world.

Excepting for that touch of alert watchfulness which he interpreted as fear, and which was perhaps no more than the nervous keenness of a creature which knows that even in its own neck of the woods there may be a dangerous enemy behind every tree stump, Annette was at ease. She was absorbed into this décor as readily as he into the atmosphere of one of his wife's cocktail parties.

Nor, Hardy perceived, as they made their way down the long, reeking, noisy room in search of table space, was her familiarity with these surroundings manifest only in her bearing. At least three times he saw her exchange nods and smiles with the men at the tables, men who thereafter gave him a long, blank stare which he could not interpret as friendlinesss nor even curiosity nor, on the other hand, as hostility.

Hardy had let Annette walk down the room just in front of him, as if the pull-up had been the grill-room of the Ritz. He saw that she was making for an empty table at the extreme end of the room. Two young lorry drivers sat at the table next to it, and when Annette was almost level with them, the one who had his back to them half turned to answer the greeting of another man passing down the aisle with his tray. Doing so, he caught sight of Annette. He rose at once and went through an elaborate pantomime of extreme deference, bowing and scraping in a grotesque parody of old-world courtesy, while at the same time twisting mouth and head to say over his shoulder to his still-seated friend, " Up on your feet, china; it's 'er ladyship! "

Annette had halted, with Hardy, to whom this remark was cryptic, at her shoulder. Hardy was uneasy, slightly excited, as if he sensed that at any moment he might be called upon for some sort of action, violent perhaps, which was not in his habits. The sensation was far from unpleasant. Although he had not understood the lorry driver's charade, nor his remark to his friend, he was aware of hostility, resentment, even something like bitterness, in the words and in the mopping-and-mowing act. And he was aware that Annette had stiffened.

Almost pleadingly, placating the man who had stopped her, she said, " Nark it, Ernie. How's yourself? "

" 'Ear that, china? " Ernie said, still out of a twisted mouth and over his shoulder, " she's speakin' to us just like she was an ordinary bint! " And then, to Annette herself, " You be careful, Annie my girl. If 'is Seven Dials 'ighness 'ears you bin talkin' to a common lorry driver, such as me f'rinstance, 'e'll 'ave the bleedin' 'ide off ye."

" Ernie Fagg, I dunno what's got into you," Annette said, and passed on to the next table.

But Hardy saw that the man's words had had a singular effect on her, she had lost all colour so that her face and lips had become grey, and she moved heavily, like an old woman. As soon as she was seated, however, she made an effort to control her fear

and turned in her chair to talk to Ernie Fagg again. As Hardy rose and made his way to the self-service pen for their coffee and food, he heard the following exchange.

ANNETTE: *You know I ain't seen 'im in months, Ernie. You see 'im, you c'n tell 'im from me to keep away, see?*

FAGG: *You carry your own messages, my girl.*

When he returned to the table Annette was sitting looking at her own painted but dirty fingernails and not seeing them. She seemed to him suddenly smaller, paler, less conspicuous, as if huddled in on herself to escape attention. When he put the mug of coffee in front of her, the plate of eggs and bacon and the dish of bread-and-butter, she did not raise her eyes, only shifted them sideways a little.

Hardy had brought only a mug of coffee for himself. It was vile, but as he sipped a little " for good manners," as his mother would have said, he watched the girl, saw her hunger overcome her fear, and was reminded, once again, of a wild animal by the way in which she began by only picking at her food, with quick, sideways glances of nervous watchfulness; and then, appetite overcoming terror, was presently eating voraciously.

This animal quality raised the pitch of his own excitement, it made a strong appeal to that side of his nature which birth, training, and expediency had suppressed. Not until she had finished, and as he offered her a cigarette, did he say, " Why don't you tell me what's the matter? "

" 'Ere," she said, instead of answering him, " chinge plices with me, will ye? "

He sought no explanation but did as she asked. It was obvious that she did not want to sit, as she had been, with her back to the door, but to face it. From his new place Hardy could not see the door they had come in by, but another, evidently opening into a second room. He nodded towards this and said, " What's in there? "

" Fruit machines," she said indifferently, her eyes on the other door.

Hardy said nothing to that but offered her more to eat and drink. Annette shook her head and with a kind of impatience said, " 'Ere, let's get out of this."

She led the way. As they made to pass Ernie Fagg's table, the lorry driver grabbed her wrist. Hardy stepped forward to interfere but Fagg had let the girl's wrist go almost at once and was saying, " Look, Annie, I don't know as I owe you a good turn, what with one thing an' another, but you watch it. I 'appen to know Rico's making 'is rounds t'night. Best plice fer you is as far from 'ere as you c'n get."

Pale, big-eyed with fear, she stared at Fagg. She said, " You won't say you seen me? "

" You know better'n that," he said, and, " Where you bin? "

" Lyin' doggo with Mum and the old man."

Fagg nodded, and she said, " Thanks, Ernie," and made for the

door, Hardy following, a little resentful of being relegated to insignificance, yet responding to the crude simplicity of the passion and violence which he sensed in these cryptic exchanges.

In theory, he reflected, he should by now be wanting to get rid of this girl lest he become involved in whatever trouble it was she and Fagg had been referring to. But in practice he was, he admitted, attracted, violently drawn to her and not simply because she was pretty and, presumably, accessible. It was also because she was squalid and dangerous.

Hardy had received an excellent education and as he followed Annette out into the mild but moonless summer night under the pale northern stars, he told himself, with an inward grin, that his trouble was nostalgie de la boue.

In silence they got into the car and Hardy drove on to the road. Almost at once they were among trees again; ancient, whispering, the forest extended on both sides of them, crowding closer as Hardy turned off the wide A road, on to the B road which was a short cut to his destination.

Presently, he heard the girl beside him sigh deeply—with relief?—and a moment later she had cuddled up close beside him, saying, " You're all right, you are, Eddie Hardy."

He did not know what to say to that. He was about to reply facetiously, but realised that to do so would be hurtful to her. In the end all he said was, " Sure I am."

" Can't you drive with one 'and? " Annette said. Hardy hesitated. He was, he reminded himself, a loving and loyal husband and father. But then he recalled, with a smile in the darkness, his London office doorman's version of an old proverb: the " Sergeant," as he was called, was accustomed to say that what the eye don't see don't black the one what does.

He put his arm round the girl's small waist and she, nestling close, took his hand and deliberately spread it over her breast. It was impossible for Hardy to pretend that he did not enjoy this and was not excited by it, and he found that his free hand was gripping the wheel with quite unnecessary force.

They had driven about seven miles in this way, and had just passed through a small hamlet of cottages huddled away from the surrounding trees about a small thatch-roofed public house, when the car's engine made a sudden loud clatter, very startling in a silence broken only by its own normal hum, the whispering of countless leaves, and the occasional hunting scream of an owl. A moment later the car had stopped.

Hardy knew nothing whatever about machinery, but he realised that that appalling clatter meant something very seriously wrong; and, at the same moment, that even in crowded England it was possible to be ten miles from the nearest garage. He took his arm away from Annette, some part of his mind sardonically noting the reluctance with which his body gave up that pleasant contact, and said facetiously, " Lady, we got trouble."

" You make me laugh! " Annette said scornfully. " Blimey, if

you want to stop fer a bit of a lark, you don't 'ave to pretend the car's broke down."

"That's fine," Hardy said, irritated, "only it happens it really has broken down."

He made no move for a moment, but sat still trying to remember whether it would be best to walk back, or on, for help. He could recall no village or even filling-station in the next few miles, whereas that hamlet, where doubtless there would at least be a telephone, was less than a mile behind. He said, "Look, Annette, I'll have to walk back to that place we just came through and phone a garage."

"Ain't you even going to 'ave a look to see what's wrong?"

"I wouldn't know unless the engine fell out," he said. But he got out and went round to the front of the car and saw that a large pool of oil, gleaming darkly in the moonlight, was spreading across the road and already fouling the grass of the verge.

Annette, joining him, looking at the oil, said, "Crikey, something knocked a hole in the sump. Broken con-rod, I shouldn't wonder."

"Say, are you a mechanic?"

"I ain't lived with lorries all me life fer nothin'. Come on, Eddie, I ain't sitting 'ere on me lonesome, I'm coming with ye."

They set out. Annette slipped her arm into his, but they did not speak. There was no traffic moving on this by-road.

The moon had risen, nearly full, whitewashing the road and silvering the grass verges and the massive, whispering heads of foliage on both sides of them. Once they walked through a cloud of sweetness, the scent from some unseen honeysuckle blooming among the trees. Behind them a screech owl called angrily four times and then fell silent. Some small animal squeaked and scuffled in the roadside ditch.

And then, quite soundlessly, black against the ascending radiance of the moon-washed sky, a stag bounded from among the trees on their right, stood at gaze for a moment with the proudly antlered head black and sharp against the silvery sky, and next moment was gone among the trees on their left as if startled by an eight centuries old echo of Red William's hunting horn. Hardy and Annette had stopped dead when the stag appeared and as it vanished Hardy felt his heart racing wildly. The man who is not a hunter has probably yet to be born.

He turned to the girl and said, "Say! Wasn't that something!"

She made no answer but reached up her arms and locked her hands behind his head and kissed him on the mouth. For perhaps half a minute they stood clasped in the moonlight and then Hardy, in a voice that shook, breaking away from the girl, said, "We better hurry. It's getting late."

When they had driven through the hamlet there had been lights in the public house. But now no light was to be seen and, holding his watch up to catch the moonlight, Hardy saw that it was long after closing time. A brief gust of warm breeze, passing as if the

ancient forest had sighed, set the inn sign above their heads creaking for a moment. Hardy looked up at it. The pub was called the Man in the Wood.

"Darned odd name," Hardy said, pointing, and went on, "We'll have to get them out of bed."

The pub door was deep under a porch which was overgrown and half obstructed by a rose whose flowers shone like silver dollars in the night and filled the air with the scent of musk. This portent of sweetness was, however, not borne out by what happened. For when, after at least five minutes of knocking and calling, Hardy succeeded in rousing someone inside the house, the voice which called down to them from a casement window noisily opened was brutally ill-tempered.

"What the 'ell," it demanded, "d'ye think you're doing down there? Trying to wake the dead?"

Annette kept within the shade of the porch. Hardy stepped back three paces and raised his face to the window. It was filled, as a frame by its portrait, by the head and shoulders of an old man with no hair, a pyjama jacket open over a scraggy throat, and a heavy moustache which failed to conceal the fact that he had not replaced his dentures when he got out of bed.

"I'm very sorry to disturb you, sir," Hardy said, his voice echoing strangely in his own ears against the silence of the sleeping, moonstruck village. "My car has broken down about a mile along the road. I was hoping that you would let me use your phone to send for help."

There was no answer. The head and shoulders vanished and the window was shut. However, a light came on in the room overhead and, as Hardy returned to Annette in the porch, he could hear a slow and heavy thumping inside the house, which he identified as the sound of an old man or woman descending a steep staircase.

A thin line of light suddenly outlined the ill-fitting front door. When the door opened the old man, a craggy giant with a shabby raincoat thrown on over flannel pyjamas washed colourless, stood squarely in their way as if to prevent them from entering. He said, "Now, what's all this?" And, with an unfriendly glance at Annette, "Two of you, eh?"

Hardy repeated his tale about the car. The old man did not interrupt, asked no questions, showed no interest, never shifted his pale grey, watery eyes from Hardy's face. But when Hardy fell silent, he stepped back into the hall, or rather passage, Hardy and Annette following.

The passage was hardly big enough to contain the three of them. On the left was a door marked PUBLIC BAR; on the right another marked SALOON BAR; facing the door a steep, narrow flight of stairs, and beside it, in a space barely two feet wide, a telephone mounted on the wall.

The old man said, "There's the phone. But I can tell you this, mister, there's nobody bar Ellis at Romney Ford who'd come this

far, and he shuts the garage at ten sharp on Fridays. You can take it from me, you'll get nobody out here till tomorrow morning."

This was said with a kind of malicious satisfaction in another's misfortune which Hardy found extremely irritating, so that he said sharply, " Are you quite sure of that? "

"There's the phone, mister. If you've got money and breath to waste, I haven't."

Although disagreeable, the old man's manner was completely convincing.

Hardy hesitated, glanced at Annette, and then said, " Then could we stay here for the night? I could phone home I suppose and tell them not to expect me."

It struck Hardy himself as significant, a sort of betrayal in advance, that he said " home " and " them," and not " my wife." His heart was thumping heavily, he was aware of the blood in his veins even to his very fingertips, and he realised that he had accepted the old man's opinion as to the impossibility of getting garage help before morning with remarkable readiness.

" This ain't a hotel, mister," the old man said rudely.

Hardy remembered something that an English friend had told him about the duties, in law, of a public-house keeper, and taking a chance he said, " I reckon this house is an inn." And, hard-faced, " What the law calls a common lodging-house."

" Lawyer, eh? " the old man said, with marked distaste and taking in the quality of Hardy's clothes, the sudden authority in his manner, and with a quick glance which was almost a leer at Annette, " I might let you have a room as you're in trouble. Cost you—" he hesitated, shifty eyed, and concluded, " two pound ten, bed and breakfast."

" Two rooms," Hardy said. He might be prepared to accept the good fortune that chance offered, but he was not going to collaborate in his own moral downfall without a struggle, if only a formal one.

" Only got one room. I told you this ain't a hotel."

Hardy was about to ask whether, at least, the room had two beds, when Annette said, " One room'll do. Give 'im the money, Eddie."

Hardy said no more, but took out his wallet and gave the publican two pounds ten shillings. The old man said, " I'll show you the way."

" Go on up," Hardy said to Annette, " I have to phone."

Five minutes later, having told Betty that his car had broken down and that he could not be home until lunchtime on Saturday, Hardy followed the publican up the stairs, hesitated outside the door pointed out to him, and then went in without knocking.

The room was vast and low and ill-lit by a pink-shaded standard lamp of low wattage. There was only one bed, a huge four-poster devoid of its hangings. Annette's scanty clothes were thrown down on the only chair.

She herself was in the bed, her face, white against the spread of her auburn hair, smiling at him.

When Hardy woke in the morning it was seven o'clock, the sun was shining into the room, a cuckoo was calling consistently somewhere close to the window which was half obscured by ivy, and Annette and her clothes were gone. Hardy supposed that he would find her downstairs. He washed as best he could at the rickety Victorian washstand.

Not until he had made sure that she was neither in the house nor anywhere near it, nor in the single street of the still silent, sun-struck hamlet, did it occur to him to look at his wallet. He did it with shame, as if distrusting her was a disgrace to himself. He had had between thirty and thirty-five pounds when he set out from the office. Annette had left him three. That was curiously considerate, and beneath his mortification he was ironically grateful.

In the Saloon Bar, rank with an old and evil smell of stale beer and cigarette smoke, a table had been laid for breakfast but with only one place. Hardy looked at it and went into the passage to telephone the garage at Romney Ford. The old man came out from the rear quarters of the house, through the door of the Public Bar, and said, " 'Too early for that. Eight'll be time enough. You better 'ave yer breakfast. Your young woman ain't 'ere."

" I guess she walked to the car for something," Hardy said. Unshaven, he felt hangdog and unable to defend himself or his privacy.

The old man said, " 'Think so?" with a manner in which insolence and servility contended.

Hardy said sharply, " What d'you mean?"

" My old woman's bike's gone. Took out of the shed."

As he was saying this the lady in question appeared carrying a tray of tea, toast, and bacon and eggs. She was a stout woman of sixty with yellow-grey hair so thin that her scalp showed through, and a disfiguring wen beside her nose. She had a frowsty look, as if she had slept in her clothes.

" Ah, gone it 'as," she said, " and as I tell 'im the proper thing's to phone the p'lice." She crossed the room and, still talking, bore the tray into the Saloon Bar, Hardy following and her husband bringing up the rear. " ' Stands to reason,' I says; ' the law's been broke, the p'lice should be sent for,' I says. But not 'im. ' The gent'll pay,' he says. And, ' That's not the point,' I says, ' it's the principle.' "

Seating himself at the table and pouring tea, Hardy said wearily, " How much?"

" It was a good bike," the woman said.

And her husband, " All we want's its value, see? Call it fi' pun ten."

It crossed Hardy's mind that there had never been a bicycle. He dismissed the idea; people were only slightly dishonest. Even Annette had left him three pounds and had a right, maybe, to

consider the other thirty odd as the rather high price of her services for a night. There had no doubt been a bicycle worth its weight in scrap-iron. He said, " That's O.K. but I've only three pounds left till I can reach my bank."

" Ah, but a gent like you'll 'ave a cheque-book, likely."

" Sure, if you'll trust me," Hardy said, starting on his eggs and bacon.

" There's them as wouldn't, but I will."

Quarter of an hour later Hardy was walking towards his car to meet the garage people who had promised to start out at once. Had the girl intended robbery from the start? Or, roused in the small hours, still ridden by fear of the man her boyfriend had called " His Seven Dials Highness," taken the money to continue her flight? Seven Dials was a part of London Hardy did not know. Was it a sort of criminal quarter?

He came again to the scent of honeysuckle and was reminded of moonlight and the stag at gaze; but there was no pleasure in the memory, he was suddenly overwhelmed with remorse for that night's work, deeply dejected, utterly unable to recapture the mood which had driven him into conduct he despised as alien to his nature. He halted in the cloud of scent and went over the ditch and among the trees to seek its source. Crimson and gold, the great woodbine plant clambered and sprawled all over a low-growing clump of hawthorn.

It crossed his mind to gather a bunch of the honeysuckle flowers for Betty, but when his hand went out to the first spray he hesitated and withdrew it. There would be gross hypocrisy in giving Betty flowers after last night: his desire to do so might be genuine, yet the act would seem like fobbing her off, contemptuously covering his deceit. A cheap get-out.

He clambered back to the road and walked on. For ten minutes he sat in the car with the door open, listening to the frantic song of larks, the clear, sweet call of blackbird or thrush, the distant cuckoo call like a repeated chime. That might be the same bird as had roused him that morning to this present misery.

The young man from the garage was brisk, his manner expert. He talked round a cigarette which he never removed from his mouth and which, though burning, seemed to remain for ever the same length.

" Broken con-rod. Clean through the sump. Funny thing, in a car as new as this one. Unusual, see what I mean? Bad luck. How long you had her? "

" Six months."

" You'll be covered by the guarantee, then. Bit of faulty steel, I shouldn't wonder. I'll tow you into Romney Ford and we'll hire you a car till we get this to rights. Suit you? "

" Fine."

It was not much after eleven when Hardy drove up to his house in the hired car. The house and garden had a strange look of newness and freshness. It was as if he had not seen them for a year or

more. The children, playing in the garden, ran to him, asking what happened to their own car, and not waiting for an answer.

Julian said, " Anyway, now you *are* here, can we go sailing? "

And five-year-old Margaret, " Daddy, Daddy, did you have a naccident? "

Betty came out of the house. As he went towards her his impulse was not to look at her, to let his eyes wander over the rosebuds in flower, the tall rank of delphiniums in the border by the old peach-wall, the white-flowered cistus trained on the wall beside the door.

He forced himself to look at her. She smiled and they kissed, and with a stab of pain he was aware at the involuntary treachery of his own senses in comparing her kiss with Annette's. Like many Englishwomen of her build and colouring, Betty's figure was unimpaired at forty, her complexion almost girlish. Almost: bright sunlight showed it fading a little, a certain dryness was apparent. His distaste for his own infidelity became loathing.

Betty said, " My poor lamb! " She linked her arm in his, leading him into the house, dismissing the children with a look they knew. " What happened? " she said. He only had to lie by omission, leaving out the girl.

" You've had breakfast, then? "

" A good one, I'll say that. How was your mother? "

" Much better. I stayed to have dinner with Father and didn't get back myself till eleven, just before you phoned. What do you want to do now? "

" Take a bath."

" All right, go and bath and shave and change. You can take the kids down to the beach and loaf till one."

" You coming? "

" No. I have that woman coming from the W.I. about the Rectory fête next Saturday."

Hardy changed not only his clothes but his mood. Down on the beach the children ran in and out of the water, small, brown, glistening bodies, as he watched them. He glanced through *The Times*, flipped over the pages of *The New Yorker*. Later, they climbed slowly back to the house, Margaret gathering the small yellow flowers of trefoil which grew beside the path. Hardy and Betty had sherry. His guilt and self-disgust were waning. Last night was an incident to forget, something outside reality.

They had eaten their lamb with vegetables from the garden and finished their strawberries and cream, and Betty was saying, " Coffee in the garden, I think," when Mona, the Irish maid, came in and said, " There's two gentlemen to see you, sir."

Hardy looked at Betty with raised eyebrows. He suffered a small premonitory thrill of fear which did not show in his face. Betty said, " Haven't a clue, darling. You'd better go and see. Get rid of them soon, we want you to ourselves."

Mona had put the " two gentlemen " in the drawing-room. They were standing in the window-bay looking out at the garden when Hardy came in, one a tall burly man in a blue serge suit and

holding a bowler hat in one hand, the other a lean, sharp young man in grey flannels. They turned from the window and the big man said, " Mr. Edmund Hardy? "

" Yes, what can I do for you? "

" Sorry to trouble you, sir. We're officers of the County Police. I'm Inspector Dowson. This is Sergeant Foulkes."

Hardy felt his insides drain white. He said, " Police? Say, did I exceed the speed limit or something? Sit down, gentlemen."

The policemen sat, each on the edge of a chair, each radiating respectful gratitude for his welcome.

" Nothing like that, sir," the Inspector said, and, " Lovely place you have here."

" It's O.K. You haven't told me—"

" Come down at weekends, sir, I suppose? Friday nights, most likely? Like some of the other gentlemen round here? "

Terror making him impatient, though he did not know what he was afraid of, Hardy said curtly, " Explain your business, please. My wife's waiting for me."

" Certainly, sir. We were hoping you wouldn't object to answering a few questions."

" Questions? Very well, but what about? "

For a moment the two policemen looked at him in silence: the Inspector looked politely friendly; the Sergeant's face was expressionless. Dowson said," About the murder of a girl called Annette Lee near Nowd in the New Forest at about five a.m. this morning."

Hardy closed his eyes. The shock was physical, as if the man had hit him in the face. The old house was silent and full of the scent of lavender from Betty's long lavender hedge. The sun shone brilliantly, the gulls called mournfully over the roof, and in the distance Julian laughed. But Hardy was in the midst of horror. From beyond the dark cloud which had gathered about his mind, he heard a gasp and turned towards it and saw Betty standing in the doorway with three cups of coffee on a tray, three glasses, and the brandy bottle.

Hardy, wiping sweat from his palms on to the upholstery of the chair, rose as the policemen rose and said, " My dear—Inspector Dowson, Sergeant Foulkes. My wife." She looked at his face, then at the policemen: she was puzzled and, because of what she saw in his face, afraid. He said, " I'll join you in the garden."

She turned to leave the room, hesitated, turned again, and sat on a chair near the door, and said, " I'd like to stay."

For a long moment Hardy stared at her. There was nothing he could do. He turned back to the policemen, offered coffee and brandy with a motion of the hand, hardly waited for them to shake their heads politely, said, " What has this—this dreadful thing to do with me? "

" Probably nothing at all, sir. We've been making a few inquiries. Been at it since six. You drive a Milemaster car, sir? "

" Yes. It's not here, though. Only my wife's Austin. My car broke down last night—"

" And it's at Ellis' Garage in Romney Ford. We know that, sir. Your registration number is an easily memorable one."

" Sure."

Dowson nodded and said, " Do you know a café for lorry drivers called, not very appropriately, the English Rose? "

" The name means nothing to me."

" It's between Selcombe and Overdown, stands back from the road, a place for night drivers."

" I think I know it," Hardy said. " I guess I've stopped there for coffee some time."

" Last night, for instance? "

" I don't . . . yes, sure."

Dowson looked over towards Betty and frowned, hesitated. She looked away from him, refusing to accept his plea for her absence. He said, " Were you alone, sir? "

There followed a complete silence. Hardy closed his eyes for a moment, seeing the courses before him. He opened them and said, " Would you mind postponing this talk for ten minutes, Inspector? I have to settle a piece of business that won't wait."

Dowson looked at him, expressionless, and then said, " This business is rather urgent, sir."

" I believe I can refuse to answer your questions? "

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"You can, sir, yes. It's rarely advisable."

"I am not doing so. I just want ten minutes to get something else attended to."

"If you insist sir, of course. We'll wait here, if Mrs. Hardy doesn't object."

Hardy moved to the door. Betty rose and followed him across the hall, where Hardy glanced out at the police car in the drive with two uniformed men in the front seats, and into the room they called the morning-room. Hardy went to the window and stared out. Over his shoulder he said, "This is going to be unpleasant for you to hear and me to say. Don't interrupt till I'm through or I shan't make it."

He told her the truth, unsparing of himself in that he made no attempt to describe the mood of wildness and dream, so alien to what he thought of as his own nature, in which he had done what he had done. Nearing the end of his account he found the courage to face her instead of talking over his shoulder with averted head. When he had finished but before she could speak he added, "I wasn't going to tell you. It was something to forget. But I wasn't going to have the story dragged out of me in front of you by those cops, either. I've nothing to say for myself."

Betty said, "I see," and looked away from him.

"Do you understand?"

"No. And now this wretched girl—"

"I know nothing about that. You must realise that I have literally told you the whole truth."

"Yes." And she added bitterly, "Because you had to."

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The following crowded silence seemed very long until Betty said, " You'd better go back to them."

" I don't know what I'm going to tell them."

" That's your business." Betty's voice was hard.

Inconsistently angry because it was no easier for her to forgive him than for him to forgive himself, he said, " Not only mine."

" Only yours," she said, whitefaced and avoiding his eyes.

Coldly, he said, " If I tell them the truth as I've told you, it puts me in the clear I think."

He fell abruptly silent, he could not say what he had been about to say, could not point out that she would be the sufferer if the whole truth came out at the inquest and his conduct that night became known to their friends, her parents—it would be forcing her to choose to bear the burden of his guilt. But to lie to the police was dangerous. It would mean that he could say nothing of Annette's obvious fear, nothing about His Seven Dials Highness.

He looked at Betty. She was staring at her hands which were clasped, white-knuckled, in her lap. He went out of the room without another word.

The policemen were sitting as he had left them, excepting that Dowson was reading a small notebook open on his burly thigh. Briskly, Hardy said, " Right, now where were we, gentlemen? "

Without looking up, and speaking sourly, Dowson said, " Asking if you were alone when you went into the English Rose just after ten last night."

To give the scene a touch of the casual Hardy rested his buttocks on the edge of the table and said, " No. I wasn't alone."

At that both men looked at him sharply, and the sourness had gone out of the Inspector's manner when he said, " You had a companion? "

" About five miles before this roadhouse a girl stepped out from the trees and thumbed a ride."

" You stopped and gave her a lift. Did you talk to her? "

" Some. Not much. Enough for politeness."

" What was her name? "

Hardy shook his head and smiled briefly. He said, " We didn't get to names, Inspector."

" You had never seen her before? "

" Never."

" You're sure of that. You hadn't, for instance, given her lifts on other occasions? "

" I had not. What are you getting at? "

" Nothing but the truth, sir. How was she dressed? "

Hardy, pretending to think, was seeing her clothes again, thrown carelessly on to the chair in that vast, dim room with the huge four-poster. He knew that his face was white. He said," Jeans and sloppy joe sweater is what I recall. I didn't pay much attention. It was pretty dark."

" I see. Well, then what? "

" We came to this place, which you tell me is called the English

Rose. I said did she want a coffee, because I did. She said sure and something to eat too, and that this was the place she was bound for anyway."

"She said that?"

"Sure. She seemed to know half the guys in the place. Truck drivers, mostly. I had coffee. She had coffee and eggs and bacon. When I went out she followed me. She'd been talking to one of the drivers, and she looked scared, and she came out with me."

Both men were watching his face keenly. Dowson said, "Scared? What of?"

"How should I know? It was none of my business. All I wanted was to get on home. Maybe she wasn't scared, it was only a kind of impression anyway. I asked her if she wanted to go on riding with me and she said no."

"No? Then what had she come out for?"

"According to my reckoning, to give the impression she was going on with me. The last I saw of her she was slipping between two of the trucks parked outside the place. Maybe she had hitched a ride in one. That's what I thought anyway. How was she killed?"

They told him and he turned sick, and when he was asked if he would allow his fingerprints to be taken—"Just a precautionary measure, sir—" and consented, his hands were shaking.

There were more questions: as if simply gathering more detail, Dowson tested the story. It stood up, or so it seemed to Hardy. When the time came an hour later to see them off the premises, he thought he had done well. He felt exhausted and deeply dejected. He could tell nothing from his inquisitors' faces. They were as bland and expressionless as their manners.

Turning from closing the door after them, he saw Betty standing at the foot of the stairs, her face hard and closed. She said, a note of anxiety piercing the indifference she tried to assume, "What did you tell them?"

"I lied."

"Was that wise?"

"No," he said, and went past her and up the stairs to his room.

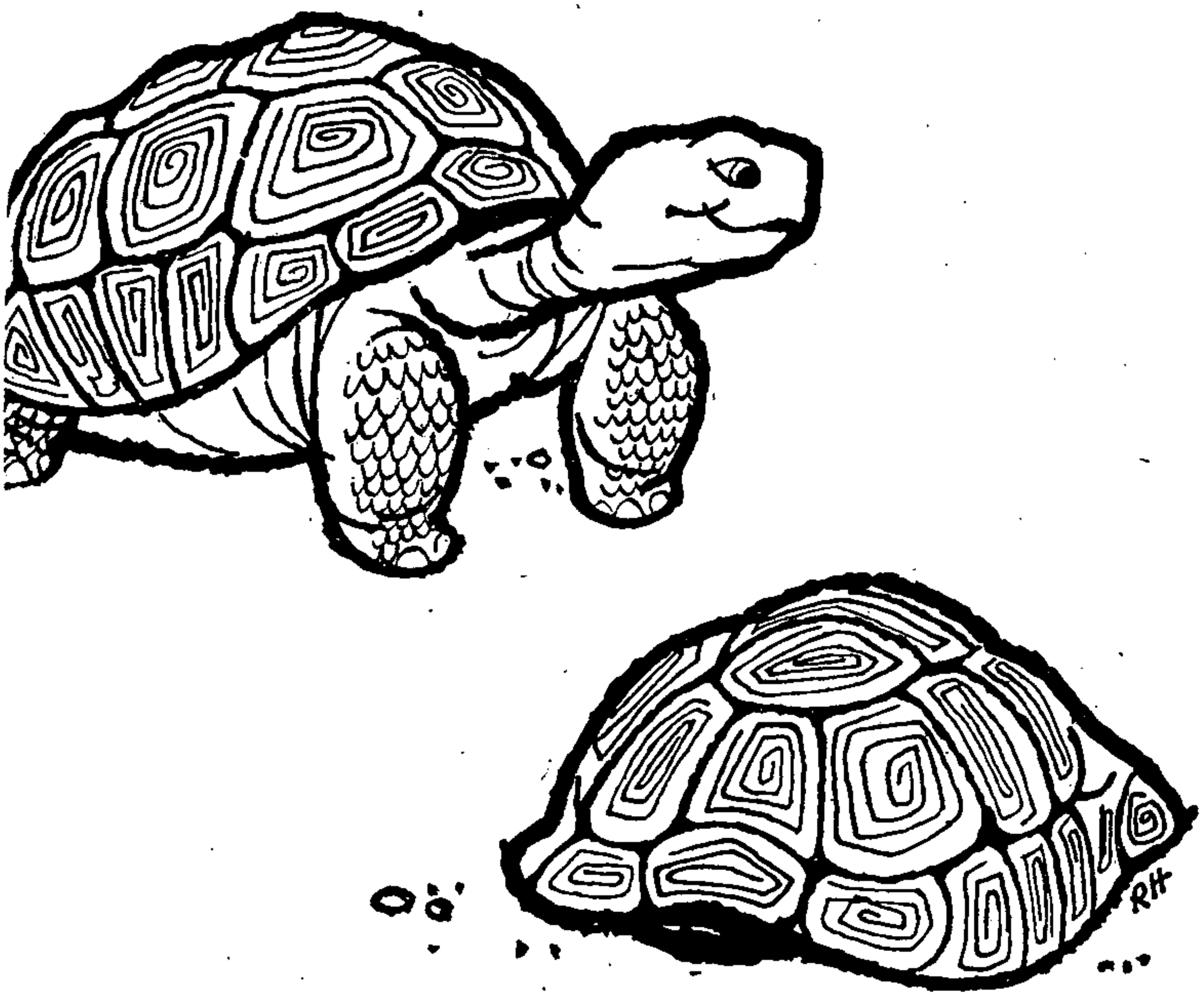
The inquest was in Romney Ford village hall. Mordaunt, Hardy's lawyer and a friend of years' standing, was still looking as worried as he had done after Hardy had told the whole story and Mordaunt had said, "Were you out of your mind?"

And when Hardy had said, "O.K., O.K., I know, it was mid-summer madness—" the lawyer had interrupted.

"Not that, I didn't mean the girl, though why you had to tell Betty—however, that's your business. No, I meant telling the police that cock-and-bull yarn."

"I couldn't tell them the truth."

"Then you should've thought of a better lie. They've only to find that public-house man to prove you a liar. That'll be good enough for them: it makes you guilty, and they'll stop looking for someone else to hang."



Why not come out and have a

GUINNESS

" All right, so I made a mess of it. Now what? "

" No idea, old boy. I'll be with you at the inquest. We'll have to see which way the cat jumps when the police let the brute out of the bag."

There was a jury, all men. A score of spectators, and a dozen newspaper men. The coroner was a fussy-looking character with an upright starched collar and a grey silk cravat secured by a pearl pin, semi-circular rimless glasses, and a small spiteful mouth. He was in conference with his officer and a superintendent of police, with silver epaulettes. When he started the proceedings he did so briskly, as if the conference had produced a conclusion and all he had to do now was to impose it on the rest of his court.

Hardy sat with his heart beating so heavily that it was like a bell tolling a death knell, while the police and medical evidence were taken. When the police doctor was describing the injuries to the girl's head inflicted with a tyre-lever found near the body, Hardy thought that he was going to faint or to be sick. The wave of icy nausea which chilled even his hands passed as the doctor subsided and the coroner recalled a police witness.

" This tyre-lever—were there no fingerprints? "

" Yes, sir."

" Have you identified them? "

" There are two sets. One is Mr. Edmund Hardy's, the other Mr. Leslie Richmond's."

Hardy did not know what happened to him then. He found himself with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. He was seeing the rough board floor between his feet in great detail: grain, cracks, small splinters like stiff fur, a small circular burn. Betty's voice was whispering urgently somewhere in space at an immense distance, but he did not know what she was saying. A heavy hand squeezed his shoulder. The coroner's voice, portentous and thundering hollowly like an operatic god's, was saying, " Call Leslie Richmond."

Hardy looked up wildly. The nightmare persisted: there was Les, his local garage man, moonfaced, nervous, unwontedly clean and tidy but for the ineradicable dirt on his hands. He took the oath in a mutter, gave his name and address, agreed that the police had called and with his permission taken his fingerprints, and that he had heard the police witness depose that one of the usual set of three tyre-levers issued with a Rutland Milemaster car was missing from Mr. Hardy's car. Hardy had missed that: how? Had he passed out?

" Mr. Richmond, do you recognise this tyre-lever? "

" Yes."

" How does it differ from any other tyre-lever? "

" It's got Rutland Milemaster stamped on it. It's a patent lever only issued with the one make of car."

" Can you explain how your fingerprints come to be on it? "

" If it belongs to Mr. Hardy's car, sir, I used it last week to swop his tyres round for 'im."

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"The Rutland Milemaster is not a common make of car?"

"No, sir. Not one of the mass production jobs."

"You have no other customer with a Rutland Milemaster?"

"No, sir."

Mordaunt was on his feet. The coroner looked at him over his semi-circular glasses. "You have a question for this witness, Mr. Mordaunt?"

"Yes, sir."

The coroner nodded. Mordaunt said, "Where are these tyre-levers kept in the car?"

"In the tool compartment."

"Where is that?"

"Offside rear corner of the luggage boot."

"Which anyone, any stranger passing, could get at without difficulty?"

"Yes, if the boot isn't locked."

"Does Mr. Hardy usually lock the boot of his car?"

"No, sir."

"So that anyone, absolutely anyone, could have taken this lever from the car while it was unattended?"

"I suppose they could, sir."

Mordaunt glanced at the jury and sat down. The coroner raised his eyebrows at the police superintendent, who slightly shook his head, and then said, "Thank you, Mr. Richmond," and, glancing at his papers, muttered something to his officer who called for Emilio Bomba.

It sounded like gibberish to Hardy. The man who stepped into the improvised witness-box and took the oath looked like an Italian and spoke cockney.

Hardy's nightmare darkened. Who was this stranger? What had he to do with it? He made himself stare hard at the witness and listen attentively to the evidence. Yes, he was a truck driver; yes, he did the Bournemouth run three times a week; yes, he invariably stopped at the English Rose for coffee and a snack; yes, he knew Annette Lee; yes, she had often been at the English Rose when he was there; yes, she often rode with lorry drivers.

Asked if he could identify the man who had been with Lee when she came into the English Rose on the Friday night in question, Bomba went through a pantomime of conscientious search before pointing to Hardy. Had he ever seen Lee with this man before? The witness hesitated and then, on a note of what sounded like defiance, said, "Yes."

Instantly, Hardy was on his feet, crying, "That's a lie! This man is lying!"

Mordaunt made no effort to restrain his client, for Hardy's face, stretched, haggard, a bone-white mask of torment, was eloquent. Betty, sitting with downcast eyes, twisted the gloves in her lap. The coroner said peevishly, "Sit down, Mr. Hardy. Your turn will come."

Mordaunt rose when the coroner had done with Bomba.

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"Mr. Bomba, you are giving evidence on oath. You say you have seen Mr. Hardy in the English Rose with the girl Annette Lee more than once. Are you quite sure?"

The witness hesitated and then said sullenly, "I'm sure, all right."

"You saw them with your own eyes? It was not suggested to you by someone else that you should say so?"

The coroner and the police superintendent looked up sharply, the coroner at Mordaunt, the superintendent at the witness, who said, "Wha' d'ye mean? Nobody never told me to say nothink."

"No. Not one of your Seven Dials friends?"

"No."

"Positive, Mr. Bomba? You do live in Seven Dials, don't you?"

"You 'eard me say so."

The coroner said, "Don't be impertinent. Just answer the questions."

"Yes, I live in Seven Dials."

"Then of course you know who I mean when I say, 'His Seven Dials Highness?'"

"Never 'eard of 'im," the witness replied; but he was clearly rattled, and he had lost colour.

"No? Think hard, Mr. Bomba. Perhaps you know him by his proper name: Rico? It wasn't Rico who suggested to you that you had seen Mr. Hardy and Annette Lee together before the night in question?"

"'Ere, what are you getting at?"

"At this, Mr. Bomba. I put it to you that you have been lying, that you never in your life saw Mr. Hardy until Friday night, June 20th; and that you—"

At this point the coroner interrupted. "I think I should warn you, Mr. Mordaunt, that unless you can substantiate the implication of your question, you are going rather too far."

Mordaunt bowed his head in acknowledgment, stared for a full half minute at the badly shaken Bomba, and sat down.

There was a silence. Then the coroner, as if nothing out of the way had happened, said, "Thank you, Mr. Bomba. Call Mr. Edmund Hardy."

"Edmund Hardy!" said the coroner's officer.

Hardy stood up. His legs were shaking. As he took the oath he realised that he was whispering, but when he tried to speak up his voice failed him. It was still almost soundless as he answered the first formal questions.

The coroner said, testily, "Just raise your voice a little, please."

Hardy saw Betty's eyes, wide and strangely empty, on his face. He made an effort and recovered some of his voice. He was taken, question by question, through his statement to the police.

Then: "When you left the English Rose, did Annette Lee go with you?"

"Not exactly. She followed me outside."

"You heard the witness Emilio Bomba say that he had seen you

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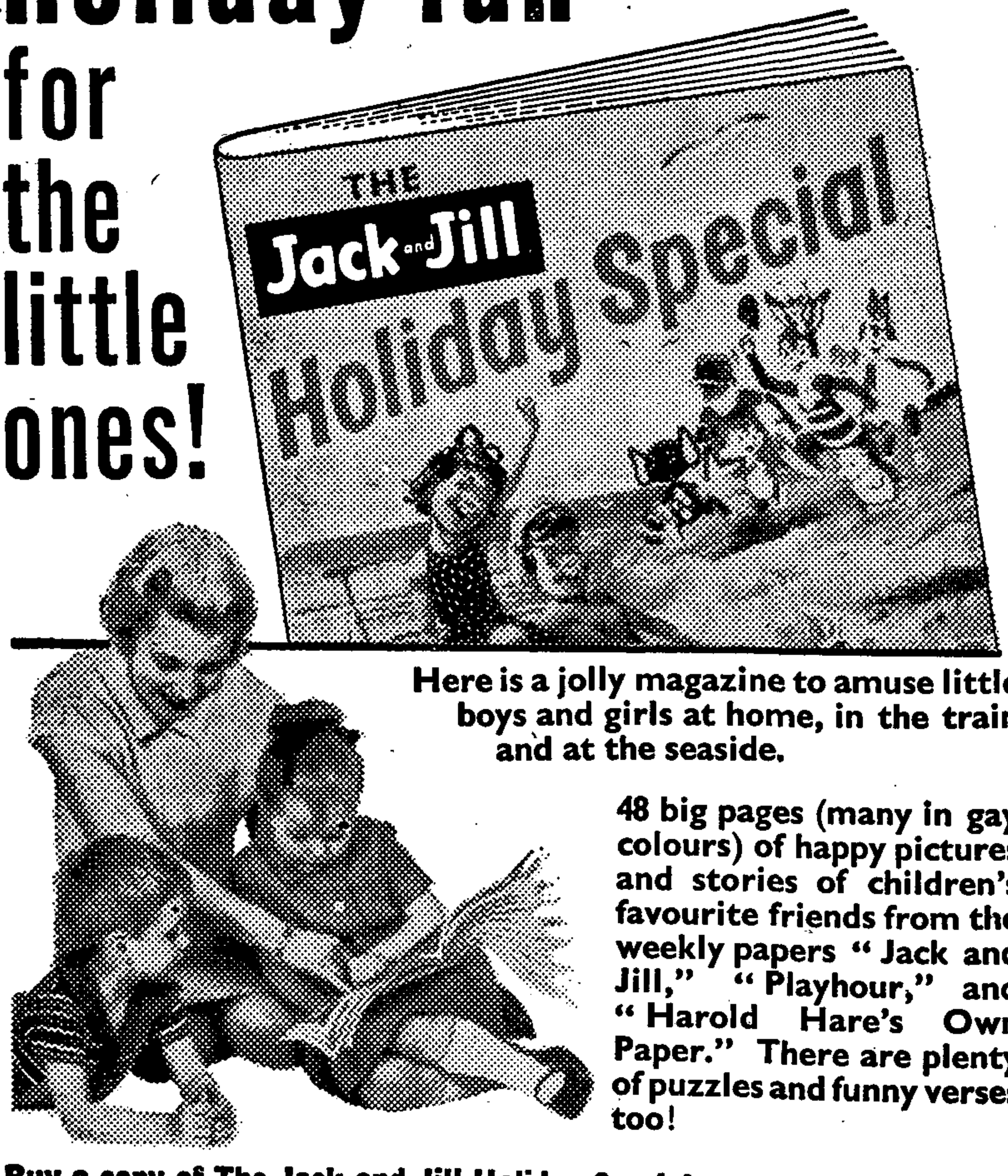

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before at the same place with this girl. Was she known to you before that night?"

"She was not."

"When you stopped to give her a lift, was that the first time you had ever seen her?"

"It was."

"You told Inspector Dowson of the County Police that when Lee followed you outside she disappeared between two parked vehicles. Was that true?"

Mordaunt had railed at him over the stupidity of this lie. The chance that the publican of the Man in the Wood would not either come forward, or be found, and questioned by the police, was remote. Hardy had at first refused to change this story: with a kind of grim self-loathing and an irrational resentment against Betty for seeming to condemn him as harshly as he condemned himself, he was determined to deny any real connection with Annette, even in the teeth of the evidence. But he could not blind himself to the force of Mordaunt's argument about their night at the Man in the Wood, and at last agreed to say that he had taken the girl as far as that house but that there she must have stolen the bicycle and gone on alone.

Before Hardy could give this answer, however, he saw Betty stand up. She looked at him across the hall; and, as if they were alone, but white, shaking a little, she said in a small, clear, carrying voice, "You had better tell them the truth. I have made a statement to the police."

Hardy was utterly confounded, not merely by the consequences which he immediately foresaw, but by this revelation of a Betty he had not known to exist. For a moment of tense silence he stared at her across the court as at a complete stranger. Then he closed his eyes and grasped the back of the chair which formed one side of the improvised witness-box, feeling as if he were suspended over a void.

He heard the coroner say waspishly, "Kindly sit down, Mrs. Hardy."

He opened his eyes again when the real reason for her astonishing intervention had become clear to him, and across the room which now, for a moment, for him also, seemed empty of strangers so that they were face to face alone, he searched her face for the love which had prompted her to save him from himself. It was not there: her face was closed against him.

The court was silent: the coroner, as if his rebuke had been merely formal, sat with bowed head looking at his papers. And at last Hardy answered the question which had given rise to this situation, saying clearly, "No, sir, my statement was not true."

Followed, elicited by questions in swift succession like blow after stunning blow of a savage moral thrashing, the hideous ordeal of public confession. It was Mordaunt who, on his feet the moment the coroner nodded to him, took Hardy back over his impression of the girl's fear, his idea that she was hunted, the cryptic conversation

with Fagg, the obscure reference to one Rico; and finally the fact that anyone could have helped himself to the tyre-lever from his car while it stood unattended outside the English Rose.

When Mordaunt sat down, leaving Hardy still on his feet, the latter felt stripped, naked, desolate, and abandoned. Nobody looked at him. Coroner, coroner's officer, and the police superintendent had their heads together and were talking in low voices and the jury members were watching them. Mordaunt was talking quietly to Betty, who sat still staring at the twisted gloves in her lap. When Hardy glanced over the faces of the idlers who had come into court for the show, or perhaps to see justice done, they looked away from him, embarrassed, as if he were indecently stark.

What came next was an announcement that the inquest was adjourned for a month. Hardy only half heard the coroner's apology to the jury: " New evidence . . . unforeseen statement made by Mrs. Hardy . . . satisfied that the last witness was telling the truth . . . further investigations by the police." He was aware of Mordaunt's hand on his arm as it reached him across a gulf.

Outside, in the street of the small town, Betty did not look at him as she got into the car. He took the wheel and drove fast, with intense concentration as if in a race, until suddenly Betty said, " Stop here, will you." They were in open country with neither houses nor traffic to be seen. With a kind of implacable calm and without a preamble she judged unnecessary, Betty said, " Mona has taken the children to my father's house."

Trying to ignore the sickness which came over him, and to pretend that he accepted that arrangement as a temporary measure of commonsense, he said, " Good idea," and went on, " I haven't thanked you yet," making that, too, sound as if he were quite light-hearted.

Stonily, she said, " You have nothing to thank me for," and put her hand on the door handle.

He pretended not to see that and said, " Only telling the truth for me, which I couldn't tell myself because . . ."

" I told the truth because I wanted it established beyond question," she said. There was a note of contempt for his own assumption of what her reason had been, which made him look at her sharply. Her face was turned towards him but it was a cold mask.

Still trying to ignore his own instinct that he had come to disaster, he said, " Sure, but I mean—"

" There could hardly," she interrupted him, " be any more irrefutable evidence for divorce than the sworn evidence given at an inquest, your public confession on oath."

" Divorce? " he said. " Who said anything about divorce? " He actually tried to smile at her, tried to imply that he believed she was simply trying to frighten him. She said nothing, and he went on, " All right, I behaved like—well, badly. But I love you, you know it, and you—"

She did not let him finish. From a cold blank her face became suddenly and shockingly a mask of such hatred and rage that it was

as if he could not see her through it, it was a cloud of black, bitter passion which hid the individual woman. Her hand groped frantically for the door handle as if a kind of panic were driving her to get away from him.

In a moment she was out on the road and there she stood, and in a voice low and hoarse, not remotely like her own, as if she were possessed, she said, " You filthy animal. Do you think I'd go on living with you, letting the children live with you, fouling them and me and the air we breathe, after what you did? To be close to you, and you with the dirt on you from the skin of that murdered slut, that truck drivers' whore—and you expect me to forgive and forget and make nothing of it. You—you—you—"

He watched her in terror, and some part of his mind not concerned with himself experienced the rare sensation of awe: her face was so distorted by furious revulsion that she could hardly articulate. She stammered, " You—you—you—" unable to lay her tongue to an epithet vile enough to express the rage he inspired. And suddenly, intolerably frustrated by the inadequacy of language to express her feelings, she, whom he had known for twelve years as a woman calm and self-possessed, gentle in emotion and shy in passion, she did something which completed the revelation of his utter ignorance of her nature, and which sent a thrill of horror through him: she put her clenched fists to her temples and screamed.

Then, as if the sound of her own cry had shocked her into that full awareness of self which was proper to the woman he knew or thought he had known, she imposed stillness on her face and, turning, began to walk away from him along the deserted road. She left him sitting there, helpless.

He had not known the self which had emerged from beneath his skin that night in the woods. Still less had he known the woman he had lived with for twelve years and who had borne his children.

He was vaguely and hopelessly aware that he should go after her, persuade her to get back into the car, to deal with the situation not on the level of the woman who had railed at him or the man he had been that Friday night; but on the level at which they had made their life together. But he was paralysed by the new knowledge that the basis of that life had been a lie, a lie he could not at once, could perhaps never, resume his belief in. And it seemed to him that although he and Betty and everyone they knew had lived at a calm level he had supposed a birthright, yet all the time the life of their feelings had been at the level Annette Lee had lived and died at.

This discovery destroyed the springs of action in him; and Hardy sat on in the car, face to face with the fear that, having gone into the wood, he would never get out again.

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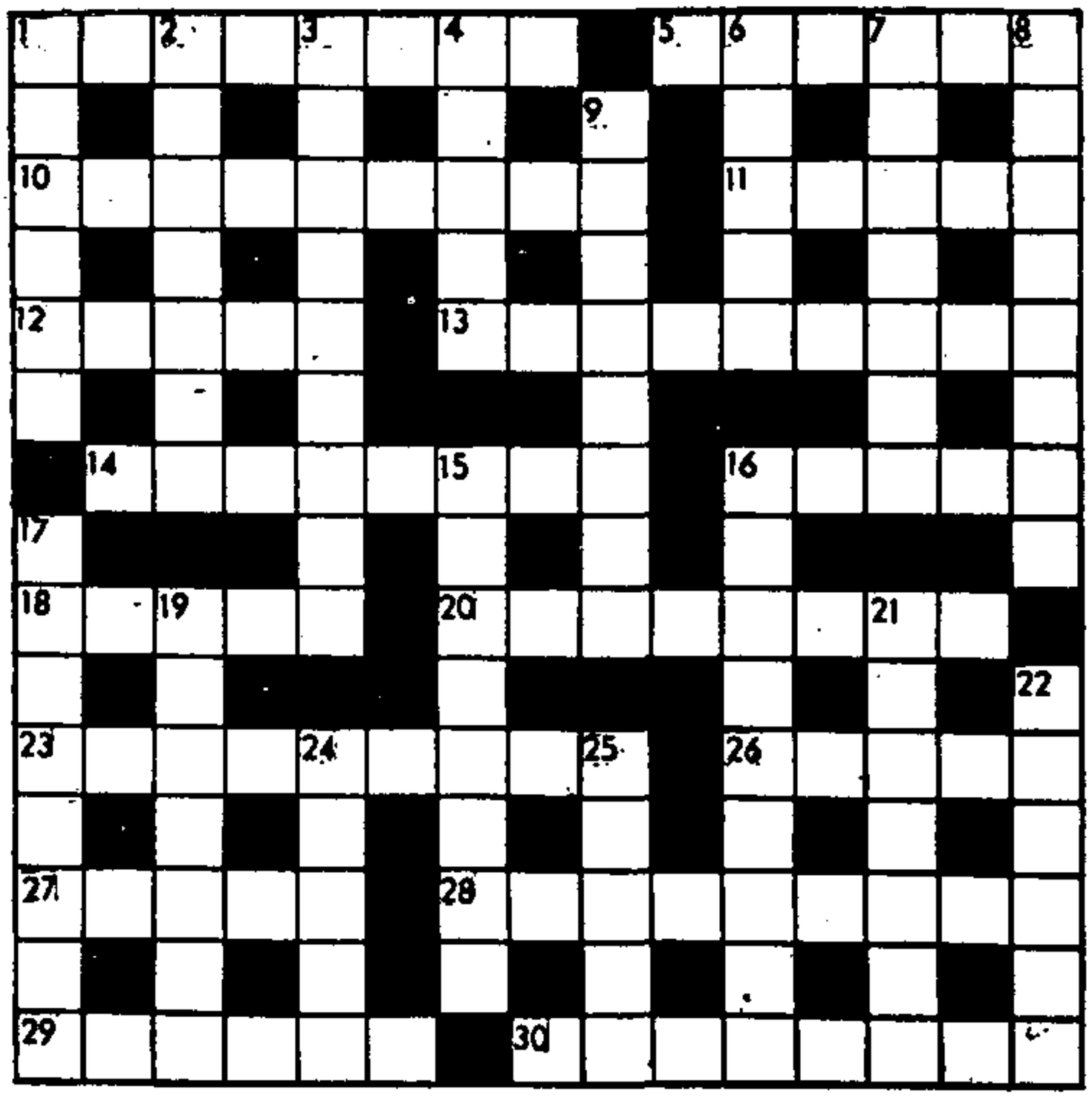
Solution on page 100



ACROSS

1 Jetty decays ? Surely not with this troupe ! (8).

5 Retired spot for Parliamentary holiday (6).

10 Dance on the sands? (9).

11 "The—— of conwiviality " (Dick Swiveller). (5).

12 Moore's Miss Rookh (5).

13 Destroy one volume to make another (9).

14 His was a classically prolonged cruise (8).

16 Severe yet rounded (5).

18 Lo, the confusion for a place to stay (5).

20 Sunbather's poet (8).

23 Joyous means of getting about (9).

26 Nonsense, but meaty (5).

27 Go round the edge, very feminine (5).

28 Add a chill to the drink, it's sweet (9).

29 Namely, an Imperial month (6).

30 Description of a TV addict ? (8).

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3 Hear Sally again ? It's all practice (9).

4 Lachrymose rents (5).

6 Hinder yourself, and it's legal (5).

7 Find new places and end in learning (7).

8 Eye-catching but idle (8).

9 Open air suggests a mural (8).

15 Little Emily involves herself in cooking (8).

16 Brilliant oarsman—makes you sick ! (9).

17 If you bathe here, do you get cleaner than clean ? (5, 3).

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21 How not to play your transistor outdoors (7).

22 Venice, the Most —— Republic (6).

24 Places, perhaps, for sore eyes? (5).

25 Quote wrongly and you have a hat (5).

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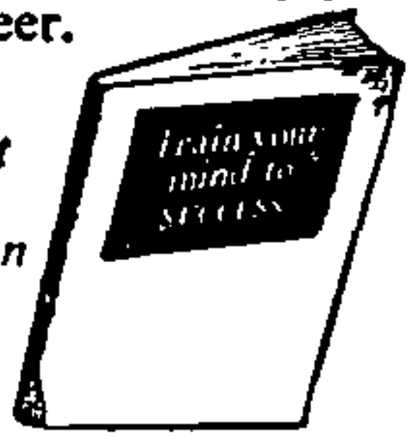

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